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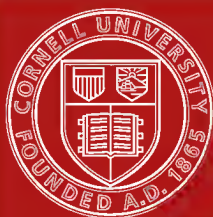
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THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
MADAME DU BARRY
BY
ROBERT B. DOUGLAS



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MADAME LA COMTESSE DU BARRY.

Dessiné par Drouais

Gravé par J. Neumann

THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
MADAME DU BARRY

BY

ROBERT B. DOUGLAS

*“Χαίροις, γύναι, ἐκ γὰρ ακουῆς
“οικτεῖρω σέ γ’,” ἔφην, “ἦν πάρος οὐκ ἰδύμεν
“Ἄ πόσον ἡιθέωη νόον ἤκακες’ ἀλλ’ ἴδε Ἀθήην
ναίεις, ἀγλαίην ἐν χθονὶ καταθήμενῃ.”*

AGATHIAS.

WITH AN ENGRAVED PORTRAIT

LEONARD SMITHERS
LONDON
GEORGE H. RICHMOND & CO.
NEW YORK
MDCCCXCVI



Gift of David G. Flinn

Thou unclean, yet unmalignant, not unpitiable thing! What a course was thine: from that first truckle bed (in Joan of Arc's country) where thy mother bore thee, with tears, to an unnamed father: forward, through lowest subterranean depths, and over highest sunlit heights, of Harlotdom and Rascaldom—to the guillotine-axe, which shears away thy vainly whimpering head! Rest there uncursed; only buried and abolished: what else befittered thee?

CARLYLE, *French Revolution*, Vol. I, Book I, Chap. IV.



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P R E F A C E

The ethics of comparative morality, or immorality, are not easy to understand. Why, it might be asked, are the virtuous English so tender towards the failings of Nell Gywn, whilst the French, who do not regard concubinage as at all a heinous offence, overload with obloquy the memory of Jeanne du Barry? In birth, in circumstances of early life, and in character, the two women closely resemble one another, yet the English "general reader" still preserves a kind of sneaking regard for the one, and has learned, at second hand, to detest the other.

This is due to the fact that he has derived all his knowledge of Du Barry from French historians, who have handed down to each other—as methodically, and almost as intelligently, as a row of workmen passing bricks from a cart to a building—the statements of Pidansat du Mairobert and that industrious compiler of fictitious Memoirs, Mlle. Guénard. Translations of several of these supposed Memoirs have lately appeared, and it is to be feared have been accepted by the uncritical portion of the public as genuine. It is not improbable that the *Mémoires historiques de Jeanne Gomar de Vaubarnier* may be included in the series, and as Mlle. Guénard was

indebted to her imagination for her facts in the compilation of that book, I judge this to be a good opportunity to bring out a 'Life of Madame Du Barry' which, despite many shortcomings, should aim at giving a truthful account of the last mistress of Louis XV.

Lest it should be imagined that I am stricken with the prevalent mania for rehabilitating, and have tried to white-wash Jeanne du Barry, I may state in advance that I have not been so foolish as to attempt anything of the kind. I have simply tried to show that she was not as black as she was painted, and that the portraits of her which have been given by three generations of historians have been overcharged with shadows.

PARIS, 1 *January*, 1896.

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Book the first

ASPIRATION

Qui n'a pas vécu avant 1789 n'a pas connu la douceur de vivre.

TALLEYRAND.

THE LIFE AND TIMES

OF

MADAME DU BARRY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

"VOLTAIRE," wrote Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, "loves all anecdotes that never happened, *because* they prove the manners of the time."

If the old philosopher ever uttered the dictum, which Walpole appears to think absurd, he probably had in mind some of the many books of "Anecdotes" and "Memoirs" which abounded at that time—books that were from title page to colophon a tissue of lies, "gross as a mountain, open, palpable."

The authors of these precious productions made no attempts to verify the statements to which they gave publicity; they had no opportunities for research, or, if they had, did not avail themselves of them, for historical accuracy would have meant loss of piquancy, and without piquancy there would have been few purchasers.

4 *The Life and Times of Madame du Barry*

Whether Voltaire ever spoke or wrote the words ascribed to him by Walpole, it is certain that no literature could have better "proved the manners of the time." Carlyle called the years before the Revolution the "Paper Age, or Era of Hope."

Alas, it was an age of paper spoiled by worthless print, and hope that fell short of fulfilment. Literature, if so it could be called, took its tone from the vices and corruption of the Court. A great nation beginning to be stirred with aspirations for freedom, asked for spiritual food, and there was vouchsafed unto it only Dead Sea apples—books that were no books, indecency doubled with dulness, sickly sentimentalism coupled with cant.

In justice to the authors or compilers of these "Anecdotes," "Memoirs," etc., it should be owned that they were not meant for publication—at least not primarily. The author was first careful to make his residence in London or Rotterdam, and then he announced that the Memoirs of some well-known personage would shortly appear. The subjects of these Memoirs or Anecdotes knew perfectly well that the history narrated would be fictitious, and that every deed in their real or imaginary lives would be put in the worst possible light, but they had no adequate defence against the libeller. The only three courses at his or her disposal were indifference, retaliation, or submission to extortion. If the person threatened showed contempt or indifference, the book appeared and was eagerly bought, the stories were believed (for, of course, if they were not true they should have been denied) and the anecdotist reaped a fair harvest. Retaliation, either by the pen or by the cudgel, was expensive and not satisfactory: to employ a pamphleteer to answer

charges made by a brother scoundrel presupposed that the same persons who read the libel would also read its refutation, and of two equally disreputable scribblers would believe only the latter. The cudgel, even when it could be applied, was only a temporary remedy;—the anecdotist, as soon as he had recovered, dipped his pen in the vinegar he no longer required for his bruises. By far the simplest and most effectual method was to buy off the libeller (especially if it could be done out of the public money) by paying a lump sum, and perhaps also a yearly pension. In that case—if the payments were made regularly—the publication was deferred until the Minister or Favourite was in disgrace or at all events not in a position to punish the libellers, even though the pension continued to be paid, for though there may be honour amongst thieves there was little or none amongst these filchers of character, and insatiable blackmailers.

The evil that these men and women did lives after them—the characters they blackened have remained tarnished, for until within the last few years historians often copied from each other, and mis-statements were repeated. Carlyle alone of all writers seems to have estimated most of these Memoirs and pretended Autobiographies at their proper value. His strong common-sense, unswerving honesty, stern loathing for a lie, and hatred for all sickly sentimentality and cant, enabled him to detect with unfailing accuracy all that was true, and reject all that was false. More than once in the course of his great “prose epic,” the History of the French Revolution, does he allude almost pathetically to the difficulty of rescuing the poor little grain of truth from amongst the rampant weeds of error which had grown up around

6 *The Life and Times of Madame du Barry*

it and choked it; and in one foot-note mentions a statement that "was not only a lie, but, singular to say, was capable of being proved to be so." For students of the present day the task is easier. Over the quagmires through which Carlyle laboured so painfully a road has been made by careful and conscientious French historians, and the destination can now be reached without danger, though, to continue the simile, the road is broken in some places, indistinguishable in others, and needs wary walking.

No one has suffered more at the hands of the baser sort of anecdotists and memoir writers than has Madame du Barry. She was a woman of low birth, little education, and no reputation, and for six years she was "Queen of France, or nearly so."¹ Naturally, she was marked down as a quarry by all the pamphleteers. It was so very difficult to make her out better than she was; it was so very easy, and withal so profitable to make her out worse than she was. Her good qualities, her kindness of heart, and easy good-humour, served only to embolden her enemies by making them secure of immunity from punishment. "We must shut up the Bastille; you will send no one to it," her Royal lover used often to say to her. A satirist who wrote some sorry verses about Madame de Pompadour was sent to prison for eighteen years, and Latude for practising on her what was only a practical joke, or harmless "sell," was sent to the Bastille, and remained there thirty-five years, before he made his escape. Madame du Barry was far less revengeful. When the lieutenant of police waited upon her and said, "Madam, we have caught a rascal who writes scurrilous songs about

¹ CHAMFORT: *Anecdotes*.

you: what is to be done to him?" her reply was "Make him sing them, *and give him something to eat!*" Still, it was better to be on the safe side, and libellers preferred to write their books in England or in Holland—or at all events date them from there—for the King's mistress might change her mind, or the King might think his honour touched through her; as he did in one instance to be noted presently.

Had Madame du Barry reflected in what light these stories would place her with posterity, it is possible she would not have been so lenient. The letters and memoirs, which purport to be autobiographical, bear some degree of *vraisemblance*, and, in default of better information, have been accepted as true by writers whose honesty of purpose cannot be doubted. As a consequence of this she has been painted as a monster of depravity and vulgarity, and has, when arraigned at the bar of History, met with worse than the scant justice meted out to her by the Revolutionary Tribunal, and on evidence no better than that adduced by Fouquier-Tinville when he demanded her head because she had worn mourning for the late King, and possessed a medal bearing the portrait of Pitt.

Not thus should History be written. Viewed impartially by the knowledge we now possess we can but feel for her more pity than horror. She was unchaste, but the chaste women at the Court of Louis XV could be counted on one's fingers. She did no good to her country: true, but she did not avail herself of the vast opportunities she had for doing harm. Had she not been raised, by the ambition of an adventurer and the senile lust of an old dotard, to the bad eminence she attained, she would have flaunted her little day in the streets of Paris with others

8 *The Life and Times of Madame du Barry*

as fair and frail as herself, until the hospital and the *fosse commune* claimed her, and the moralists and historians would have had some other subject for their diatribes. For it cannot be supposed that the King's character would have changed, and that if he had never seen Du Barry he would never have had another mistress. Princesses and Duchesses whose ancestry dated back to the Crusades, were anxious for the position of *maîtresse en titre*, and their fathers, husbands, and brothers, schemed to get it for them. Some years after the death of Louis XV, the Comtesse du Barry, who was then living in retirement, paid a visit to the Princesse de Beauvau. The conversation turned upon Court life in the time of the late King.

"Ah," said Madame du Barry, with a sigh, "how you all did hate me in those days!"

"Hate you?" replied the Princesse. "Not at all, my dear, I can assure you. We only wanted your place."

Other classes had other reasons for hating Madame du Barry. "The nobles through a spirit of caste, the philosophers because they were protected and encouraged by Choiseul and his sister, the people from hatred to the royal profligacy—all took up the cry against Madame du Barry, whose only crime was that she was fit for the degrading position to which the love of the King had called her.¹" It should be remembered that her power (for it can hardly be termed happiness) endured for less than six years, and was followed by nineteen years of seclusion which to one of her vain and giddy temperament must have been as bad as imprisonment,

¹JULIA KAVANAGH: *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol I, p. 300.

and terminated with a violent death which her cowardice rendered ten times more painful. Surely the most rigid moralist will concede that she paid a heavy price for her sins.

To arrive at a fair estimate of her character it is necessary that we should examine briefly the evidence upon which she has been condemned to the execration of posterity.

From the day when Louis first felt her power of fascination, epigrams and songs were made about her. They owed their existence mainly to the Duc de Choiseul and to his sister the Duchesse de Grammont. The latter was said to have aspired to the place of *maîtresse en titre*, and her brother espoused her cause, but it was not until later that there was declared enmity between him and the King's favourite. These literary small arms had no effect, and were treated by Madame du Barry with amused contempt. The first and most successful attempt to "blackmail" the King's mistress was that of Thevenot de Morande.

Charles Thevenot, the son of a procureur, was born at Arnai le Duc in 1748. He was educated with a view to following his father's profession at Dijon, but, even when a schoolboy, displayed a remarkable aptitude for getting into disreputable scrapes. He ran into debt, and finally his father refused to give him any more money. Young Thevenot enlisted in a regiment of dragoons, but soon became disgusted with soldiering, and promised to lead a better life if his father would purchase his discharge. His father consented, but young Thevenot was no sooner free than he ran away to Paris, where he assumed the name of De Morande. He became a *chevalier d'industrie* and

attracted the notice of the police. Swindlers found short shrift in those days, but unfortunately, before he could get hanged, his father obtained a *lettre de cachet*, and had his son locked up, first at Fort l'Eveque, and afterwards at Armentières. After being in prison some fifteen months he was released, and at once went over to England. Ere long he discovered his genius for libelling, and issued *Le Gazetier Cuirassé* which contained scurrilous stories about everybody of importance who was not prepared to pay a good price to have them suppressed.

Then Madame du Barry came into favour, and he intimated to her that he was about to bring out a book entitled *The Private Life of a Public Woman*. She was perfectly well aware that if he was acquainted with the facts of her life the book would be bad enough, and that if he had to invent his facts it would be worse still, and she implored the King to prevent the publication. Louis was so intensely selfish that had it merely been a matter of protecting his mistress from the insults of a libeller, he would have taken no steps in the matter, but he was in some degree personally affected, so he sent three or four men over to England with orders to capture De Morande and throw him into the river. De Morande, however, was too old a hand to be caught napping, and managed to get timely warning of the arrival of these emissaries, and, before they had time to carry out their programme, he denounced them as spies, and they quickly returned to France, having narrowly escaped the two-fold fate of being torn to pieces by the mob, and lodged in prison by the English Government.

Just at this time Beaumarchais was having his celebrated law suit with Gutzman. Louis admired the man's ready

wit, quickness, and determination, and a day or two after the verdict had been given the King said to Le Bel, his *valet de chambre*,

"This Beaumarchais is a friend of yours, is he not?"

"Yes, sire," replied Le Bel.

"Is he a man who could perform a delicate mission with discretion, secrecy, and dispatch?"

"Your Majesty can rely upon him implicitly," was the answer.

A few days later the "Chevalier de Norac" (Beaumarchais' baptismal name Caron, read backwards) landed in England, with plenary powers to treat with De Morande for the purchase of the MS. of the book. De Morande stuck out for his price, and Beaumarchais returned to France either to get the money or for further instructions. His second visit to England proved successful; terms were arranged and De Morande received £800 down, with an annuity of £160 a year, and reversion of part of this annuity to his wife. Three thousand copies of the work had been printed, and some had been already sent to Holland. Beaumarchais dashed off to Rotterdam and was in time to prevent the distribution of these copies. He then returned to England, and saw the MS. and all the copies of the book burned in a lime-kiln near London. Beaumarchais, who was nothing if not moral, severely reprimanded De Morande for his conduct to his wife,—“a respectable Englishwoman, whom he made very unhappy,”—and furthermore obtained for his new protégé an appointment as police-spy, a vocation for which De Morande was eminently fitted and in which he is said to have done good service to the French Government. “He was an audacious poacher, and I have con-

verted him into an excellent game-keeper," Beaumarchais wrote to M. de Sartines, the Lieutenant of Police.

A kind of friendship grew between the two men, for De Morande had a deep respect for the ability and shrewdness of Beaumarchais, who, on his side, being as hopeful as he was energetic, thought that De Morande might be brought to see the error of his ways, abjure libelling and live honestly. In a letter to De Morande written by Beaumarchais soon after his return to France, he says,

"You have done your best, Monsieur, to prove to me that you willingly assume the feelings and conduct of an honest Frenchman;—your heart must have reproached you, long before I did, for having strayed from the right course. As I believe that you intend to continue in this praiseworthy resolution, I feel a pleasure in corresponding with you. What a different destiny is ours! By chance I am chosen to prevent the publication of a libellous book. I work day and night for six weeks, I expend 500 louis to prevent numberless misfortunes. You gain over the affair 100,000 francs and tranquillity, whilst I do not even know if I shall be paid my travelling expenses."

The letter was hardly calculated to strengthen De Morande in the right way, and convince him that honesty was the best policy, but Beaumarchais had reason to be aggrieved, for on his return to France he found Louis XV dying, and of course Louis XVI and his Ministers would not pay hush money for Madame du Barry.¹

¹On the whole, however, Beaumarchais was not a loser by his journeys. Whilst in England he heard a good deal about the War of Independence, and he subsequently made a large sum of money

Whether Thevenot de Morande desisted in future from libels and slander, as M. Lomenie asserts in his *Life of Beaumarchais*, may reasonably be doubted. He returned to France, and the guillotine did *not* claim him (though Carlyle says it did) but he had a narrow escape, and wisely retired to his native town, where he died in 1799 or 1800. But if he wrote nothing more, he had already, before Beaumarchais called upon him, brought out the *Gazetier Cuirassé*, which contained many abominable assertions about Madame du Barry. To select one instance at random, it is stated that Madame du Barry had founded a new Order at Court for men and women;—but women were not eligible unless they had lived with at least ten different men.

As soon as the King was dead—for before that, as one of the writers naïvely remarks, “it would not have been advisable to enquire too closely into the life of

by supplying arms, clothing, etc., to the American settlers. The success of the De Morande mission also caused him to be employed in suppressing the publication of a pamphlet concerning Queen Marie Antoinette, which a Jew, named Angelucci *alias* Hatkinson (*sic*), was about to bring out. His object accomplished, he returned to Paris, but heard that the wily Jew had made a mental reservation as to the “rights of translation,” and was on his way to Vienna with a copy he had saved from the general destruction, with a view to having the book translated into German and Italian, and published in those languages. How Beaumarchais rushed after him, overtook him in a wood, half killed the faithless Angelucci, and was himself nearly murdered by robbers, and how his life was saved by a gold box (containing an autograph letter of Louis XVI) which he wore on a ribbon round his neck, will be found related in that excellent work, Lomenie’s *Life of Beaumarchais*.

Madame du Barry"—the presses of Paris, London, and Holland began to pour forth fictitious biographies. Two of these, published in the years 1774—1775, deserve a passing notice. They are the *Anecdotes sur Madame la Comtesse Du Barri* and *Précis historique de la Vie de Madame la Comtesse Du Barry*. The first of these is now generally attributed to Pidansat de Mairobert. The title page bears no place of publication, but only the name of the book, the date 1775, and two lines from the Second Satire of Horace,

"Haec ubi supposuit dextro corpus mihi laevum,
Ilia & Egeria est: do nomen quodlibet illi."

—a piece of execrable bad taste which forms a fitting prelude to the contents of the work. The stories of the early life of Madame du Barry are utterly and entirely false, and those relating to her public life not often trustworthy, though the writer says in the preface: "Moreover it must not be imagined that in collecting everything carefully, there has been brought together without selection a mass of fables and absurdities which are current concerning this celebrated courtesan. It will be seen that from her birth until her retirement authorities are adduced for all that is stated." Pidansat de Mairobert must have had very singular ideas as to what constituted an authority.

A reprint of the book, in a larger form, but not containing any new matter, came out in 1776, and a copy fell into the hands of Madame Sara G.—(Goudard) who thereupon produced *Remarques sur les Anecdotes de Madame la Comtesse Dubarri*. It professed to be "translated from the English" and bore on the title page, besides "à Londres" and the date 1777, the singular quotation from

the *Æneid*, "Bella horrida bella!"—which was perhaps quite as appropriate as anything else would have been. Sara G. rates Mairobert soundly, but the conviction is borne in the reader's mind that, like Hal o' the Wynd, she is fighting for her own hand, and is more concerned in making a book which would share the popularity of the *Anecdotes*, than in shielding the reputation of Madame du Barry. She starts by relating how a "Milord" called upon her (she was living in England at the time), and finding her with a pen in her hand asked her what she was doing. She told him she was going to answer the *Anecdotes*, whereupon he replied, "If you are going to run counter to popular prejudices you will not have any readers till a hundred years have passed."

Madame Sara Goudard did not take her friend's advice, but soon tired of following Mairobert through the endless windings of falsehood, and finally owned that she had not the courage to continue her remarks on the rest of the anecdotes of Madame Dubarri; "those which follow are scurrilous, flimsy, and so filled with falsehoods that they do not excite my pen." Her judgment was sounder than her logic.

The other book mentioned, the *Précis historique*, bears evidence of being the work of a woman. The title page is dated 1774, and the writer states in the beginning that "now Madame du Barry is compelled to drag out the miserable remains of her life in a convent, we consider her as absolutely dead to the world, and consequently, having finished in regard to us, as well as in regard to herself, her brilliant career, she is, in short, at the mercy of everybody who chooses to write about her."

The premises which lead to the inference that the

work is that of a woman, are : a good deal of religious feeling, no little spite of a feminine nature, and the addition of three years to Du Barry's age, for surprise is expressed that the King could have been fascinated by a woman who was twenty-five years old.¹ There are copious notes which are often instructive, and when they purport to be extracts from English newspapers are distinctly amusing. The following is a good specimen of "English as she was wrote" in the eighteenth century.

"La Barry happening to be Choiseul his partner, said she was up by honnours, how can that be, answered he, I hâve not any, knows that, replied the Ladi; but *i have the honnours without you.*"

The *Précis* can be used—sparingly, and with due caution—in compiling a biography of Madame du Barry, and the writer deserves a word of grateful recognition for her remark that the author of the *Gazetier Cuirassé* "does not appear too respectable an authority and prefers piquancy to probability."

Of the other fictitious Memoirs, Letters, etc., we need say little. The *Lettres Originales* are palpable forgeries. They also are believed to be the work of Pidansat de Mairobert. If so, he did not live to know the fate of his work, for early in 1779—the year in which the letters were published—he committed suicide. Had he been as "thorough" in other matters as he was in his method of taking

¹ As a matter of fact Madame du Barry *was* twenty-five when she became the King's mistress, but this was not known to any of her biographers, and she passed for twenty-two. It was a lucky guess on the part of the author of the *Précis*, who owns that she (or he) knows nothing of the first eighteen years of Du Barry's life.

his life his literary reputation would have stood higher. He was implicated in some politico-financial affair, and thought he would be disgraced,—for he held some official posts, was Secrétaire des commandements to the Duc de Chartres, Secrétaire du Roi (nominally at least) and literary censor!—so he opened his veins with a razor, whilst in a warm bath, and then blew his brains out with a pistol.

From the post-Revolutionary period we may select two books for mention,—a *Life* by “M. de Favrolle” which appeared in 1806, and the *Mémoires de Madame la Comtesse du Barri*,¹ (6 vols., Paris, 1829-30). “M. de Favrolle” was the pseudonym adopted by Madame Guénard, a literary hack whose pen was seldom out of her hand and who was ready for work of any sort,—licentious novels, or moral stories for the edification of school-girls. It was said of her that she wrote for the “instruction of youth, and the amusement of the barracks,”—the epigram might have been completed by the addition of “the confusion of scholars.” The *Mémoires* are, according to M. Octave Uzanne, “the compilation of Lamoignon-Langon, and without the least weight of authority.” Both books are untrustworthy but that very defect makes them not altogether useless, as the historian who is writing on the period treated of is compelled to corroborate or reject their statements by reference to other authorities.

M. Capefigue in his *Reines de la Main Gauche* published 1857, attempted the difficult task of proving that Du Barry was a sort of misunderstood angel. He rushed to the other extreme, and did nothing except prove that

¹ Translated into English as “*Memoirs of Madame du Barri*,” 4 vols, London, 1830.

he had a hopelessly bad case, and could be quite as inaccurate as his predecessors.¹ A year or two later the real truth about Du Barry began to be known, thanks to the researches of M. Leroi. He was the librarian at Versailles, and had in his charge a number of MSS. relating to Du Barry. He was a patient, quiet worker of the Dryasdust school—the right type of man when a large accumulation of rubbish has to be sifted. The result of his labours was incorporated by the Brothers de Goncourt in *Les Maîtresses du Roi* published in 1860.

The literary style of this book is—as might be expected—excellent, but though we get a better and more just appreciation of the character of Madame du Barry, we do not quite arrive at the truth, though we have made a long step in the right direction. There are still some inaccuracies caused by a too ready acceptance of unfounded statements made by the anecdotists, and it may even be said that the charms of the literary style accentuate rather than diminish these faults.

Another well-known literary man—M. Emile Gaboriau—also included the Du Barry in his book *Les Cotillons célèbres* (Paris 1861, 2 vols. 12mo), but he was then a young man of twenty-five, and had not found out where his strength lay, and though he afterwards wrote some of the best detective stories in the world, he showed in this work much more of the novelist than of the detective. Some of the other books of the same decade, such as *Cotillon III* by M. George d'Heilly, were largely composed of “slabs” cut out of the work of the Brothers de Goncourt.

¹ He has been, not inaptly, compared to the bear in La Fontaine's fable, who, to kill a fly that had settled on his master's nose, dropped a heavy stone, and killed the man as well as the fly.

The best work on Madame du Barry appeared in 1883. It is by M. Charles Vatel, and is a history in three volumes. M. Vatel lived at Versailles, and was a friend of M. Leroi. The two worked together on several subjects, but they had a "tiff" over some literary question. This did not, however, prevent M. Leroi placing all the resources of the Versailles Library at the disposal of M. Vatel. The latter was a literary Dryasdust, and relentlessly and indefatigably hunted down every fact which could bear on the subject of his book. He has no literary style, but he has even a rarer gift, an untiring perseverance, an aptitude for analysing and reconciling contradictory statements, and a rare talent for detecting falsehoods. These qualities more than suffice to make the book an excellent one, and it is a pity that it should not be better known.

Much of the obloquy—all that was possible with a due regard to truth—has been removed from the memory of Du Barry, and we may now (if our eyes are not still blinded by prejudice) see her as she really was. When the veil is raised we find, not a monster of iniquity, not the incarnation of all the worst vices of France when France was at its lowest ebb of morality, but merely a beautiful, light-headed, good-hearted, open-handed harlot. We should no more blame her for being what she was, than we should reproach the grasshopper for not being as industrious as the ant. "She was *une bonne fille*—we must content ourselves with that expression for it is the only one which depicts Madame du Barry at one stroke.¹" As another writer has said, "Truly she was the type of the *bonne fille*, foolish, careless, credulous even,

¹ E. and J. DE GONCOURT: *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV.*

but she never abused her power to cause mischief; all the faults which are imputed to her fall on the shoulders of the people who surrounded her. In her time, it is true, a terrible abuse was made of *lettres de cachet*, but we must lay the blame on the Duc de la Vrillière, whose mistress sold them publicly; for fifty louis you could imprison a man. The favourite, however, was not implicated in any of these infamies; many times even she used her influence to restore to liberty poor wretches who were unjustly detained.¹"

When compared with Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry indeed shows in a far better light than does her predecessor. An author who has studied the lives of both, says,

"Was the Comtesse du Barry more immoral than the Marquise de Pompadour? I do not think so. Was she more injurious to France? I do not think so either. For myself I scarcely see any difference. I am inclined, however, to consider Madame de Pompadour more guilty than Madame du Barry. The husband of one was far better than that of the other. M. Lenormand d'Etiolles had not like M. du Barry concluded, under the pretence of marriage, a shameful contract. He loved his wife, surrounded her with every comfort, paid her every attention and kindness, and did nothing to deserve the unjustifiable desertion and treason of which he was the victim. Du Barry on the other hand deserved his lot. Whatever may be said to the contrary, the Marquise was not more a lady than was the Comtesse. Madame de Pompadour was elegant, but the Du Barry was not less so. Both learned to talk

¹ EMILE GABORIAU: *Les Cotillons célèbres*.

the language of Versailles, and to wear a handsome toilet as gracefully as women of the highest rank of the nobility. D'Aiguillon, the favourite of the Comtesse, was of as good a family as was Choiseul, the favourite of the Marquise. Both forced their relations on the aristocracy. If one metamorphosed her brother, Abel Poisson, into Marquis de Marigny, the other married Vicomte Adolphe du Barry, her nephew, to the daughter of the Marquis de Tournon who was connected with the great houses of Condé and Soubise. The Comtesse had certainly this one advantage over the Marquise that we cannot attribute to her the responsibility of any war, or the choice of any general.

"Evil passions, hate and rancour, ambition and cupidity, love of rule, spirit of domination and pride, were infinitely more marked in the character of Pompadour than in that of Du Barry. The one was a woman of the financial world, intriguing, calculating, mistress of herself, an egoist, haughty, and vindictive. The other was a daughter of the people, without virtue, but without malice, without elevated sentiments, but incapable of mischief; having all the faults of the courtesan, with all her carelessness, prodigality, and playfulness. In the gallery of women of Versailles I would place Du Barry far above Pompadour, because the Comtesse had, say her contemporaries, a quality which was wanting to the Marquise, and which condones many errors, whims, and vices,—goodness of heart.¹"

This is not an isolated opinion; that of the Brothers de Goncourt, though more neatly and tersely put, is to the same effect.

"All Madame de Pompadour's life belongs to history.

¹ IMBERT DE ST. AMAND: *Les dernières années de Louis XV*

22 *The Life and Times of Madame du Barry*

It is a life of business, intrigues, negotiations, a responsible part in politics, public exercise of power, relations at all times with Ministers, Ambassadors, Secretaries of State, soldiers, financiers, lawyers; the management of the interests of the nation and the will of the King; a burden on the destinies of France and Europe. The life of Madame du Barry will neither justify nor satisfy equal curiosity on the part of posterity. She took no part in the State, or in history. Take away one incident, her struggle with Choiseul, and she was only the best treated kept-woman in the kingdom."

Madame de Pompadour may be exonerated from the charge of having lost Canada to the French,—the war which led to that was opened by England in the most flagrantly inexcusable manner, but she was gravely concerned in the events which led to the battle of Rosbach. It was hardly to be called a battle in the soldier's sense, for the fighting was over in a couple of hours, but in another way it was one of the greatest battles ever fought, for it taught the Germans that the French were not invincible. It may be said that the seed from which the present German Empire sprang was sown on the field of Rosbach. Pascal declared that if Cleopatra's nose had been an inch shorter the destiny of the world would have been altered; and perhaps if Frederick the Great had not growled out a coarse word about Madame de Pompadour, Alsace and Lorraine would never have been lost by the French. As a proof of the heartlessness of Madame de Pompadour it may be mentioned that she entrusted the command of an expedition to one of her personal enemies, in the hope that he might be discomfited, and was infinitely disgusted when he returned with something almost approaching honour.

Yet not only in the writings of the women who were jealous of her wondrous beauty, and of the men who were paid, or hoped to be paid, to vilify her, but also in the pages of grave historians there is a tendency to make the venial faults of Madame du Barry outweigh the heavy sins of Madame de Pompadour. Perhaps, as it is no sin for a man to labour in his vocation, they feel a lurking tenderness for the woman who "made history," and a supreme contempt for the woman who did not, though she had the chance, and was immoral into the bargain. The one, between two flirts of her fan, sent hundreds of brave men to destruction, but she did it in the most courtly and lady-like manner; the other only opened the Bastille doors to release the innocent, and saved a wretched child-mother from the gallows;—and it was really hardly worth the risk of stubbing a good goose-quill to record incidents of that nature—besides which the woman was vulgar as well as indecent. Is the doctrine that "cleanliness is next to godliness" so unimpugnable that even its converse holds good, and we must be taught that uncleanness is worse than ungodliness? Greed, envy, malice, ambition, callousness to all interests but her own, and half a score of other sordid vices, go for nothing in De Pompadour, for she was well bred, and actually blushed, or very nearly so, if anyone made use of a coarse epithet in her hearing; but Du Barry was vulgar, and vulgarity is ridiculous, and, as the Duc de Guines said to his daughters, "Remember, my children, that vices are of no consequence, but ridicule kills."

Not in this spirit should the history of Madame du Barry, or of any mortal, virtuous or improper, be written. In these pages there will be no attempt to make her out

24 *The Life and Times of Madame du Barry*

a saint—she was very far from that—but if her life was a “sorrow for angels,” let us attempt to show that it was not “one more devil’s-triumph.” She was a woman—a bad woman, because her fault was the only one good women cannot pardon: want of chastity!—a good woman, because within that fair breast beat a heart that was tender, compassionate, forgiving. The court lady who started up with an exclamation of “Fi, l’horreur!” because the King’s mistress sat by her side, had, not improbably, witnessed unmoved, Damiens torn to pieces by horses, but Du Barry’s gentle blue eyes had never gazed on any suffering they did not long to relieve. From her tiny “Cupid’s bow” mouth there dropped the most obscene phrases, but never a word that could give a wound; it never whispered into the King’s ear a desire for revenge. She chose Vice, but she never had the chance of becoming virtuous. There is, says M. de Goncourt, in the Greek Anthology an epitaph on a young girl, in which the hope is expressed that the earth will lie light upon her corpse, for she, when alive, was so light upon the earth, and he adds that no sentiment could better befit the grave of the beautiful, good-hearted, careless, unfortunate courtesan, Jeanne Becu, Comtesse du Barry.

CHAPTER II

BIRTH—GENEALOGY—SCHOOL-DAYS

ON the 19th August, 1743, an old priest sat in the vestry of the little church of Vaucouleurs, a village or small town of France, now in the Department of the Meuse. Near him stood a man and a woman, who were, as might be seen from their dress, respectable peasants, or small shop-keepers. The woman carried in her arms a very young infant. The child had just been baptised, and the old priest, who was writing in a big book, was entering in the parish register the name of the infant, and the date of its birth and baptism. When he had finished he read aloud what he had written. It ran as follows:

“Jeanne, natural daughter of Anne Becu, sometimes called Quantigny, was born 19th August, 1743, and was baptised the same day, the sponsors being Joseph Demange, and Jeanne Birabin. L. Galon, Vicar of Vaucouleurs.”

The sponsors wrote their names beneath the entry; the man in bold and distinct characters, the woman in an illegible scrawl. From the slope of the letters it would appear that Jeanne Birabin wrote without using her left hand, and we may surmise that she was carrying the baby on her left arm, and this interfered with her penmanship, for her name occurs elsewhere in the register,

and the signatures to the other entries are much better written.

This formality being completed, Jeanne Birabin carried her god-child back to her mother, Joseph Demange went about his usual vocation, and both were very far from imagining that the little nameless bastard for whom they had stood as sponsors, would some day be one of the most powerful personages in Europe, the favourite of the King of France, and, if she cared to be, the arbitress of the fate of Ministries, and, perhaps, of nations;—that when she dined, a nobleman, wearing the Order of St. Louis, would hand her her napkin; when she drove out, the widow of a Marshal of France would occupy the front seat;¹ that, if she expressed an opinion in politics, couriers would ride night and day to report her words; that the daughter of an Empress would be enjoined by her proud mother to show as much respect and consideration as possible for the Royal Mistress; and that two of the daughters of Louis XV would try to get the Pope to annul the marriage of the favourite, in order that their father might espouse her.

If Joseph Demange and Jeanne Birabin bothered their heads at all about little Jeanne Becu it was to wonder who was her father. His name is not mentioned in the

¹ Madame la Marechale de Mirepoix was paid the handsome salary of £4000 a year for acting as chaperon to Madame la Comtesse du Barry. The old lady was not very proud of her position, and on one occasion endeavoured to persuade her niece, Madame de Bussy, that the money was given her in compensation for some losses she had suffered, "but not, I assure you," she added, "for anything I may have done for Madame du Barry." "I should think not," replied her niece, "or, if so, you are very badly paid."

certificate of birth, and it was unknown to everybody except perhaps Anne Becu, who appears to have guarded the secret well, for the mystery as to the paternity of Madame du Barry remains unsolved to the present day. In all old French encyclopædias and biographical dictionaries, and even in some recent English ones, Madame du Barry's real name is given as Marie Jeanne Gomard de Vaubernier, and an exciseman named Vaubernier is mentioned as her reputed father. The most diligent research has failed to discover any trace of the existence of a person named Vaubernier at Vaucouleurs, and this is not to be wondered at, as we now know that the entire name, with the exception of the "Jeanne," was borrowed by Madame du Barry, or invented for her. The person to whom tradition points as the father of Madame du Barry was a Picpus monk or brother, named Jean Jacques Gomard. These existed in Vaucouleurs at that time a small community consisting of eight brothers of the Third Order of Franciscans, generally called Picpus monks, because the chief monastery of the order was situated at Picpus, a village to the north-east of Paris. The local legend, or tradition, declares that Anne Becu, who was a sempstress, went to work at this convent, and was seduced by one of the monks, Jean Jacques Gomard, whose religious name was Frère Ange. It may be urged that Franciscan monks were not very likely to require the services of a sempstress, and, even if so, would not have chosen a remarkably handsome woman, as Anne Becu is said to have been. The Tertiaries, or members of the Third Order of St. Francis, were not, however, strictly speaking, monks. They were "non-conventual members, who continued to live in society without the obligation of celibacy,

and, in general, were only bound by the spirit, and not the letter, of the rule."

If Frère Ange was the father of Jeanne Becu we can understand why she first adopted the name of l'Ange or Lange, and afterwards that of Gomard, and perhaps also why the curé of Vaucouleurs, anxious to avoid scandal to religion, did not insert the father's name in the certificate. Unfortunately all the documents relating to the brotherhood perished in the Revolution, and there seems little probability that we shall ever know with certainty who was the father of Madame du Barry. The story about her mother being seduced is not plausible. Anne Becu must have been nearly thirty at the time of the alleged seduction, for she was more than thirty when Jeanne was born, and hardly likely to be deceived by the first friar who tried his blandishments upon her. "When History makes a drama it does it very well," M. Sardou has said, but on the other hand History often destroys many pretty pictures of fancy. Just as we are prepared to sympathize with Anne Becu as one who loved not wisely but too well, and who became the victim of some monkish or military Lothario;—whilst we depict her as living in seclusion and weeping bitter tears over her beautiful, golden-haired child, History points with inexorable finger to another page of the parish register, where—alas, for human frailty—we read under the date of 14th February, 1747, a record of the birth of "Claude, natural son of Anne Becu." Luckily for historians, Claude never became distinguished in any way, and so we are spared the trouble of seeking among Anne Becu's numerous lovers for the name of his supposed father.

The genealogy of Madame du Barry cannot be traced, on

the mother's side, beyond her grandfather. He was named Fabien Becu, and about 1690 was in business in Paris, either as a locksmith, or, more probably, as a *rotisseur*, or roasting cook, an avocation which has now become almost extinct. He, like several others of his family, was a remarkably handsome man. The Dame de Cantigny, Comtesse de Montdidier, fell in love with him, and married him. She bore him one daughter, and then died, leaving her affairs in a very involved condition, and Fabien Becu found himself once more obliged to work for his living. He became cook in the service of the beautiful Comtesse de Ludre, one of the mistresses of Louis XIV, who had been exiled from the Court, and was then living near Vaucouleurs. In a few years' time he married Jeanne Husson, a young woman who, like himself, was or had been in the service of the Comtesse de Ludre. By her he had seven children, three sons and four daughters. Charles, the eldest son, entered the service of Stanislas, King of Poland, either as a footman or a valet. He assumed the name of Cantigny, or Quantigny, though he had no possible right to the name of his step-mother. Anne Becu also must have used the name, or she would not figure as "dite Quantigny" on the birth certificate just quoted. Anne was born, we learn from the Vaucouleurs register, on 16th April, 1713, her sponsors being Antoine Carmouche and Anne Gaspur, who are vaguely described as "a young man and young woman."

With the exception of Anne, all the family held menial positions. Her father had been a cook, her brothers were all in service,—two of them in Paris, one in the employ of the Duc de Gramont, and the other in the household of the Duchesse d'Antin,—and her elder sister, who, from

her beauty, was known as *la belle Hélène*, was lady's maid to Madame Bignon, the wife of Armand Jérôme Bignon, a member of the Academy, and Keeper of the King's Library.¹ Of the other two sisters nothing is known. Anne was ostensibly a sempstress, but as we know that she was a handsome woman and lived in a rather large and comfortable house, we are inclined to believe that she had more lucrative and less reputable ways of making a living than by dress-making, and this supposition is strengthened by the fact that she had at least two illegitimate children.

Possibly the birth of little Claude in 1747 had something to do with the determination of Anne Becu to move to Paris. Morals were lax enough at the Court and in the city, but in a little country town gossips would talk not too charitably about a woman who had two "love children," and it may easily be surmised that Vaucouleurs could no longer be a pleasant place of residence for Anne Becu. To Paris accordingly Anne Becu brought her children some time between 1747 and 1749, and before she had been very long in the capital, she married on 19th

¹ This latter post was hereditary in the family of the Bignons, and was held by the uncle and the son of Armand Jérôme. In 1770 when the Dauphin (afterwards Louis XVI) was married to Marie Antoinette, Armand Jérôme Bignon was *prévôt des marchandes*, and it was owing to his carelessness that the terrible stampede occurred on the occasion of the firework display on the Place Royale, when three hundred persons lost their lives. The Parisians hardly expected that Bignon would be punished, but they were disgusted to see him in his box at the Opera, three nights after the accident, and some wit made an anagram on his name, *Ibi non rem, damna gero*, (I do no good, I do harm).

July, 1749, a man named Nicolas Rançon, who is described on the marriage certificate as a "domestic." How the newly married couple lived we have no means of knowing. It is said that Anne became a cook, and, twenty years afterwards, when Madame du Barry was at the height of her power, sarcastic allusions were made by the courtiers to her mother's supposed calling. On one occasion, when the favourite was playing *vingt-et-un* (her favourite game) she "overdrew," and exclaimed laughingly as she threw down the cards, "I'm cooked" (*Je suis frite*). "Madam," said a courtier, "far be it from me to contradict you. You really ought to know best."

Little Jeanne, when about six or seven years old, appears about that time (1749) to have attracted the attention of a rich old financier and army contractor, M. Billard-Dumouceaux. How he became acquainted with the Becus is unknown. Thevenot de Morande, Pidansat de Mairobert, and the host of scribblers who wrote pretended lives or memoirs of Madame du Barry, and who invented whatever was necessary to make their facts fit, assert that he was the god-father of Jeanne. They relate how he was present at Vaucouleurs when the wife or mistress of Vaubernier was confined, how he stood godfather to the child, paid for all the rejoicings, and gave a handsome present to the father, who was one of his subordinates. The story reads so plausibly that we might almost believe it, if recent research had not shown that the name of the *parrain* of Jeanne Becu was Joseph Demange, and that Vaubernier was a myth. There seems, however, reason to believe that M. Billard-Dumouceaux knew something of Anne Becu before she left Vaucouleurs. Perhaps he had been one of her admirers, or perhaps he had been fascinated

by the grace and beauty of Jeanne, and had constituted himself a kind of informal guardian to the child. Montigny, a writer whose accuracy is not lightly to be impugned, says, "M. Billard-Dumouceaux never lost sight of his charming ward. She always spoke to me of him with expressions of gratitude which do honour to both parties."¹

M. Billard-Dumouceaux was rich, kind-hearted, and a friend of the arts. He was also an amateur artist. "He drew excellently in pastels, and never travelled without a box of pencils," says one who boasted of knowing him well.² This will perhaps account for the strange fact that in the inventory of the Château de Louveciennes, the residence of the favourite, mention is made of two portraits of Madame du Barry when a child. It is certain that, whether Anne Becu was a cook or not, she was not in a position to pay an artist to take her daughter's portrait. It is not impossible that Dumouceaux may have seen the child at the house of one of his friends where Anne was employed as cook, and struck by the rare beauty of Jeanne—for she was already known as "the little angel"—had received her into his house.

The friends who came to the house of the rich financier took notice of the child. One of them, the Abbé Arnaud, boasted in after years that he had nursed upon his knees a little girl who afterwards became Madame du Barry.³ He was a wit (who was not in those days?) and said when he was told that Marmontel looked dull and bored, "that is because he hears himself speak." He was far from imagining that the child he dandled on his knee would one

¹ *Les Illustres victimes vengées*, p. 98.

² *Vie de lui-même par Grosley*.

³ CHAMFORT: *Caractères et anecdotes*.

day open the doors of the Academy for him. In the meantime he had an opportunity of doing something for her, and thinking that it was quite time she began to be educated, he procured for her admission to the Convent of Sainte Aure.

This convent had been founded by the curé of Saint-Etienne du Mont, as an asylum for young girls of his parish whom poverty had led into dissipation, but a few years previously it had been changed to an establishment for "the education of youth, where they are instructed in Christian piety and in arts suitable to women." The convent was under the control of the nuns of the order of Saint Augustine, who, according to a guide to the churches of Paris of the period,¹ endeavoured to make it "an asylum open to all young people born of honest parents who may find themselves in circumstances in which they incur risk of ruin. How many there are who endowed with external beauty (so often fatal to virtue) are reduced to want! Where will they find an angel to free them, to preserve them from the jaws of the lion always ready to seize some prey."

The nuns numbered fifty-three, and the pupils about forty. These latter paid two hundred and fifty to three hundred francs a year and extras. Occasionally ladies, who wished to do penance, would retire to the convent for a few weeks or months. The pupils rose at 5.0 a.m., and heard mass at 7.0 in the private chapel of the convent. Dinner was at 11.0 a.m. (the food was plain but sufficient), and at 9.0 p.m. all retired to the dormitories. The costume was severely simple. On the head a black woollen hood, with a band

¹ Regulations of the nuns of St. Aure, quoted by the De Goncourts.

of coarse cloth tight across the forehead, chemise and veil, unstarched; a frock of Aumale serge, white and plain; yellow calf shoes fastened with cords, of the same. Playfulness, joking, raillery, affectation, and even laughter were forbidden and punished.¹ The nuns devoted the greater part of their time to instructing their pupils in religious duties, reading, writing, spelling, music, needlework of all kinds (particularly embroidery,) and house-keeping.

To this nunnery Jeanne Becu was sent with "six towels and two pairs of sheets," when she was about seven or eight years old, and as we hear no more of her until she was fifteen, it has been conjectured that she was at school all the time. If so, it was probably M. Billard-Dumouceaux who paid the bills, but in this case, as in so many others, all the documents were destroyed in the Revolution, and we are reduced to conjectures. The authors of some of the apocryphal books about Madame du Barry,—Pidansat de Mairobert, Restif de la Bretonne and others of the same class who were indebted to their imaginations for their facts—state that she was expelled from the convent for having smuggled in some improper books. As there is not the slightest ground for such a charge we may acquit her, but we may infer that her school-days were not happy, that she was often punished, and had in after-life no pleasant recollections of the days she spent among the sisters. It seems almost certain that in the time of her prosperity she did nothing for the nuns, but on the other hand they seem to have done next to nothing for her whilst she was under their charge.

¹ Réglations of the nuns of St. Aure, quoted by the Goncourts.

During the eight years she spent in the convent she acquired but little knowledge, and if she could write fairly well could certainly not spell. In some of her letters there are as many as twenty-three faults in orthography in nine lines, and even the all-important verb *être* had difficulties for her which she never mastered. She often wrote *il et* and *ils son*, and ignored the existence of the final *s* in the plural of nouns. But her spelling if defective was quite equal to that of her contemporaries. Even Madame de Pompadour, who was intended from an early age to be the King's mistress, and was taught every accomplishment that could fit her for the post, could never distinguish rightly between the possessive pronoun *se* and the demonstrative pronoun *ce*, and some of the great ladies of the Court in their reproaches to the light-o'-love cavaliers who had deserted them for some fresher or fairer face, are stated to have used the expression: *Vous ne mémé plu*—a phonetic rendering of *Vous ne m'aimez plus*. In justice to Madame du Barry it must also be said that if her spelling was faulty, her literary style was clear, that she read many of the best authors, and was one of the very few French people who have been able to appreciate Shakespeare,—though, as she did not know English, she was forced to read him in a translation.

The Convent of Saint Aure, however, left some impression on the mind and character of Madame du Barry. She had been taught household management, and, even when she was scattering broadcast the public money at a terrible rate, she was careful to enter in her housekeeping book all her receipts and expenditure, and she took an inventory of all her property. She wrote to her steward

Denis Morin, that he was on no account to forget to make jam of all the fruit grown upon her estate. Whatever were her faults it cannot be said that she was irreligious. She gave profusely to churches and charities, and when she was sent to the Abbaye du Pont aux Dames her conduct was so exemplary that the Abbess, Madame de Fontenille, who had been strongly prejudiced against her, became quite friendly towards her, so much so that the enemies of the now fallen favourite accused her of a hypocritical simulation of devotion. In 1792 she gave shelter, at the risk of her own life, to several priests. Finally when Louis XV was seized with his last illness, Madame du Barry sent a large sum to the curé of St. Etienne du Mont in order that special prayers should be made to St. Geneviève for the King's recovery. A few days later a friend said to the curé, "Your prayers do not seem to have been of much avail." To which the priest answered with a quiet smile, "On the contrary, the Saint has done all that could be wished. Is not the King dead?"

CHAPTER III

LOVE AFFAIRS

By the year 1758 Jeanne Becu (or Marie Gomard de Vaubernier as Mairobert & Co. prefer to call her) was of nubile age, and of course it would only be a natural consequence of her innate depravity—or their own—that she should have a lover. One of them—it really does not matter which—accordingly invented a story which the others have copied faithfully. The girl, they say, was apprenticed to a milliner named Labille, about 1760. Amongst many other adventures, she there met with a hair-dresser named Lamet, who used to come to Labille's shop to see his two sisters who were employed there. He met Mademoiselle Lange (the name by which the future Madame du Barry was then known) and offered to teach her hair-dressing. She accepted, and after very few lessons he proposed to her that she should become his mistress. She eagerly accepted the proposal, left Labille's and at once installed herself in Lamet's rooms. Her natural extravagance showed itself thus early. In fewer than three months she had expended the three thousand francs the hair-dresser had saved, and he was finally forced to fly to England, leaving Mademoiselle Lange to lament his loss, and to earn her living in a manner which may be guessed.

By the industrious research of the late M. Charles Vatel, the only writer whose statements concerning Madame du Barry can be accepted with absolute faith, it has been discovered that a young man named Lametz, who was a hair-dresser, did cross the path of Jeanne Becu, but in 1758 not in 1760. On 18th April, 1759, Anne Becu, accompanied by her daughter, appeared before the Sieur Charpentier, commissary of police of the quarter, to make a complaint against the Widow Lametz, dress-maker, living in the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs, opposite the offices of the Compagnie des Indes. At the Hotel of the Compagnie des Indes lived a Dame Peugevin, who had, for maid, H  l  ne Becu, the sister of Anne and aunt of Jeanne. They used often to go and see their relative, and they met there a young hair-dresser named Lametz, who came to *coiffer* Dame Peugevin. No doubt the young man admired Jeanne, and when Madame Ran  on proposed that he should teach her daughter hair-dressing he readily expressed his willingness to do so. In December, 1758, he first began the lessons, and they lasted about five months. At last his mother began to notice his frequent absences, and on making inquiries found out that he spent much of his time in the Rue Neuve-Saint-Etienne, where the Ran  ons then lived.

The daughter of a servant did not appear to her a desirable match for her son, and she at once went round, in a terrible passion, to the abode of the Ran  ons. She found Anne Ran  on and her husband at home, and the irate *bourgeoise* scolded them in no measured terms. She accused them of taking her son from her; called Madame Ran  on an old procuress, and said her daughter was no better than she should be. Jeanne arrived home in the

middle of this storm, and though attacked personally, did not reply to the virago but retired to her room.

The next day Madame Rançon and her daughter went to the commissary of police to lodge a formal complaint against Madame Lametz for slander, and to demand protection against any future attacks on her part. Rançon does not appear to have taken any part in the quarrel beyond giving his wife authority to prosecute Madame Lametz. He is described by Grosley, who declares that he knew him, as "a quiet, shy man, deeply marked with the small-pox," and perhaps he did not wish to be mixed up in his wife's quarrels.

No record has yet been found of any further proceedings in the case, and we do not know whether any damages were recovered for the slander, or whether Charpentier contented himself with sending for Madame Lametz and advising her to keep a more civil tongue in her head in future. M. Vatel thinks, with some reason, that Madame Rançon and her daughter could hardly have been leading abandoned lives at that time or they would not have dared to go before the commissary of police; or, if they had done so, he would quickly have sent them away again, instead of drawing up a long *procès-verbal* of the affair. On the other hand, if the matter was but a mere squabble between a dress-maker and a cook, and never got beyond the commissary's office, how did the scandal-mongers who wrote the *Anecdotes* and *Memoirs* come to hear of it, and why did they fix upon the hair-dresser Lamet as being the first protector of Madame Lange? The explanation may perhaps be found in the fact that when the Duc de Choiseul saw that it was war to the knife between him and Madame du Barry, he not only employed literary bravos

to traduce her character as much as possible, but also applied to the lieutenant of police for any information about her, and it is not unlikely that the record of this affair was dug out by some of the police officials. It appears from this document that Jeanne used her step-father's name, Rançon, at this time. M. Vatel thinks that there can be no truth in the story of Jeanne having ruined the young barber, because in the list of bankruptcies at the Hotel de Ville—which luckily was not destroyed in the Commune—the name of Lametz does not occur. Of course if Lametz had a shop and business of his own he would have been declared a bankrupt when he fled to England, but there is nothing to prove that he was in business for himself, indeed the inference is rather that he was not.

The next definite information which we have about Jeanne Becu is that she was lady's maid, or companion, to Madame de la Garde, the widow of a *fermier general*. According to the Anecdotists, she obtained this position through the good offices of a certain Abbé Gomard, a paternal uncle, who had made the acquaintance of his sister-in-law and niece under curious circumstances.

Anne Rançon and her daughter had been arrested for "soliciting," when the Abbé who chanced to be passing saved them from the police by means of a judicious bribe. He was astonished to find that the two women—apparent strangers, whom he had rescued out of sheer goodness of heart—were the wife and daughter of his deceased brother. He henceforth interested himself in their welfare, and it was by his means that a situation was found for Jeanne with old Madame de la Garde, to whom he was chaplain. We may dismiss as fictitious, the tale that Madame de la Garde had, living with her, her two sons,

both young men; that the boys both became enamoured of the pretty lady's maid, and quarrelled about her; and that this caused a scandal which ended in Jeanne, her mother, and her supposed uncle being all turned out of the house.

Madame de la Garde certainly had two sons, and though we do not know when they were born, we know that they were both married on the same day, 3rd June, 1751, at the Church of St. Roch, the eldest, Nicolas de Delay de la Garde, to Mademoiselle de Ligniville, Comtesse du Saint Empire, and the younger, François Pierre de Delay de la Garde, to Mademoiselle Duval d'Epinay. Nicolas was a secretary of the King's finances, and intendant of the estate of the Dauphiness, and François Pierre was President of the Grand Council, and held several minor posts at Court. That either, or both, brothers made love to Mademoiselle Jeanne is not at all improbable, but they were not two schoolboys fighting for the favours of a *soubrette*, but middle-aged men both holding responsible positions, and both already married eight or nine years. Moreover they did not live with their mother, but each had his own house, Nicolas living in the Place Louis le Grand (now Place Vendôme) and François Pierre in the Rue Neuve du Luxembourg.

In these stories it is difficult to tell whether Pidansat, Thevenot, and the others are lying purposely and maliciously, or whether they simply err out of ignorance. The conclusion to which the student of history will probably arrive is that when Madame du Barry herself is in question, they would not tell the truth if they could, and that in regard to other persons, they could not tell the truth if they would. The only definite rule which seemed to guide their pens was always to believe the worst of everybody,

and if two versions of a tale were open to choose from, to select that which would show the subject of the history in the worst possible light. None of these writers ever troubled to verify a statement, and the few facts one does come across in their books are usually ascribed to the wrong person. Thus, for instance, Pidansat says that Madame de la Garde "was guilty of all sorts of absurdities and extravagances; she was accused of odious vices and shameful habits." As a matter of fact the old lady died in 1769 in full possession of all her faculties, and seems to have been rather a strait-laced person for the times in which she lived. It was her daughter-in-law the comtesse du Saint Esprit, the wife of Nicolas de la Garde who went out of her mind and committed absurdities and extravagances, and was finally *interdite* (27 February, 1767) on account of "mental alienation, misconduct and dissipation."

Jeanne Becu was not long a lady's maid, and soon left the De la Garde household, though there is no authority for supposing that she left in disgrace. Some time in 1760 or 1761 she was in the employ of a Sieur Labille, a milliner, in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs. His shop, it would appear from an advertisement, was to the east of the Rue de Richelieu, and near where the Bank of France now stands. She was at this time in her eighteenth year, and must have been in the full zenith of girlish beauty. It would have needed considerable strength of moral character to have withstood the temptations to which a pretty girl would be exposed in such a place, and poor Jeanne Becu was without any moral stamina. If she had hitherto preserved her virtue, and it is doubtful whether she had, it was not likely to hold out

long before the constant assaults of the "delightful do-nothings and handsome lords"¹ who frequented Labille's shop under pretence of buying lace ruffles and cravats. The example, and possibly the teaching, of her mother would only serve to convince Jeanne that there was no advantage in being chaste, but she no doubt resolved to make a better market for herself than her mother had done. That she had a lover or a dozen lovers is tolerably certain, and it is not unlikely that she skilfully played them off one against another. She may have argued as did her contemporary, the pretty and witty actress, Sophie Arnould, who when her manager expostulated with her for having a fresh lover every day, excused herself on the ground that it gave them so much pleasure and cost her so very little trouble.

It is not worth while to ascertain who were the lovers of "Mademoiselle Lange." We may dismiss as apocryphal the story of the young painter who lived over Labille's shop and who one day found pinned to his door a capital portrait of himself. He wrote underneath the drawing that he should like to make the acquaintance of the caricaturist, and she replied in the same manner that if he would leave his door open the next morning she would come and breakfast with him. He prepared a good breakfast, opened his door, and, at the time appointed, in walked Mademoiselle Lange. He naturally surmised that a young woman who would invite herself to breakfast in a bachelor's room would not be too particular, and, as was said of the hero of a certain Scotch ballad, "he had the good taste to be wanting in respect," but was promptly checked by "*la petite* Lange," who informed him that if he would

¹ MM. E. and J. DE GONCOURT: *Madame du Barry*.

draw up a paper promising to pay her so many hundred francs a month, she was ready to become his mistress, but until that document was signed he must treat her with respect. As he could not afford the sum named he could not avail himself of the offer and Mademoiselle Lange's visits ceased.

The author of the anecdotes has—as is usual with him—here outstepped the bounds of probability. The gilded youths who frequented Labille's had keen eyes for a pretty face, and it was not very likely that beauty like that of Mademoiselle Lange would pass unnoticed, and that she would be obliged to offer herself to an impecunious artist. Moreover, some of the lovers the anecdotists ascribe to her were rich, and there is no reason to imagine they would not be liberal. The principal person with whom her name was associated at this time was Radix de Ste Foix, a *fermier general* and navy contractor,¹ and who seems to have been the only one of Madame du Barry's lovers of whom Louis XV had ever heard, for, soon after the favourite made her appearance at Court, the King in talking about her to the Duc d'Ayen asked, "Is it true, as they say, that I have succeeded to Sainte Foix?"

"Sire," replied the sarcastic courtier, "Your Majesty succeeded Sainte Foix, as you succeeded Pharamond,"—implying that in both cases there had been a good many others in between.

But the heaviest and most injurious charge which was ever brought by the anecdote-mongers against Madame du Barry—an accusation that was never levelled except from the safe distance of London—was, that after she left

¹ He is not to be confounded with Saint-Foix, the dramatist, and the hero of so many duels, who was born in 1698.

Labille's she was a woman of the town, and even for some time an inmate of the "disorderly house" kept by Madame Gourdan, the most notorious procuress of the day. This lie—for so M. Ch. Vatel proves it to be—was a veritable gold mine to the blackmailers and brought many thousands of francs into their pockets. If the charge had been met and faced it would have been difficult for the detractors of the favourite to have proved their statement, but they might have found out, or invented something else, and Madame du Barry and the King were, perhaps, well advised in buying the silence of Thevenot de Morande and other writers of that class.

Yet, in spite of these assertions, there is every reason to believe that, however bad Madame du Barry may have been, she had never descended quite as low as her enemies made out; for in the lists of loose women kept by the police no name that resembles any of those by which she was known is to be found. Yet at that time the police *ne badinait avec l'amour-venale*, and noncompliance with the regulations meant—if detected—transportation, and transportation was only another word for death. To the objection that the list is not complete it may be answered that it contains 30,000 names, and the probability of one so notorious as Mademoiselle Lange being left out of the list appears very small.

In the pretended *Life and Letters* of Madame Gourdan—a book which is believed, and with every show of probability, to have been written by Thevenot de Morande—there is a letter supposed to be written by the woman Gourdan, in which she describes how she allured the *petite Lange* to her house and induced her to become a *pensionnaire*. The letter could not be reproduced here as it is disgust-

ingly licentious, and carries on its face a striking proof that it is a forgery, for it is written in exactly the strain in which a man who was a libertine would write, but not at all in the manner which an old procuress would be likely to use. According to this abominable letter the girl was found at the brothel by M. Billard de Dumouceau, who threatened the old woman, for having ruined his god-child, to have the house closed, and kept his word. If so he must have nursed his wrath for about fourteen years, for it was in 1776 that the woman Gourdan was sentenced, her house closed, and she had to ride through the streets of Paris mounted on an ass, with her face to the tail.¹ At that time Louis XV had been dead two years and Madame du Barry was in disgrace. Bauchamont says that the judge who tried the case was so amused with Gourdan's ledger, which contained a list of all her *pensionnaires*, that he took the book home to peruse at his leisure, and M. Vatel thinks that if Madame du Barry's name had appeared there it would have been made known. Madame Sara Goudard states that Gourdan always denied that Du Barry had been an inmate of her house, and when questioned by a gentleman on the subject, replied, "No, sir, I am not so stupid as to blab (*m'afficher*) in that way. What is true though is that when there was a question as to whether Madame du Barry should be received at Court, a stranger came to me and offered me a large sum if I would publicly attest that Du Barry had been one of my *pensionnaires* I would not consent to

¹ The case had, however, dragged on for eight years. The cause of it was that the wife of the bailiff of Douai was found in Gourdan's house with her lover. See Bauchamont's *Memoirs*.

publish such a lie.¹ Too much weight must not be given to Sara Goudard, however, as she was herself an adventuress and had been the mistress of Ferdinand of Naples, and a fellow feeling might have made her kind enough to excuse or palliate Madame du Barry's faults, but though not a pattern of respectability, her evidence is more trustworthy than that of Thevenot and Pidansat, and, on the whole, we gladly come to the conclusion that the charge against Madame du Barry is "not proven," and that it cannot be shown that she was ever an inmate of a house of ill-fame.

But it must not be supposed that Jeanne Becu led a virtuous life during these three years (1760—1763). We have no record of her amours, for History did not stoop to record the love affairs of a fair and flighty little milliner, being unable to foresee that the little milliner would some day be one of the most important persons in France. It is not very likely that she stayed long at Labille's. In all likelihood she flitted from one rich lover to another, and if she was ever *maîtresse en titre* it could only have been for a short time, or else we should find some mention of her in the hundreds of chronicles of the small talk and scandal of the time. Doubtless she frequented, in company with her "protector" for the time being, the haunts of the *demi-monde*, and was frequently to be found in those private gaming dens which then abounded in Paris. Some of these gambling dens, kept by real, or pretended, members of the aristocracy—broken down Comtesses and Marquises—made a show of being exclusive, and only admitted within their portals punters

¹ SARA GOUDARD: *Remarques sur les Anecdotes de Madame du Barry*, page 12.

who belonged to "good society." One of the most notorious of these houses was that kept by Madame (or Marquise) Duquesnoy, in the Rue de Bourbon.¹ Duquesnoy had two professions, both equally honourable, and augmented the receipts of her *cagnotte* by commission received for introducing her young lady visitors to admirers. The name of Lange was far too common for the kind of society she would meet at Duquesnoy's, and Jeanne added another to the already long list of cognomens, and invented, or had invented for her, the high-sounding patronymic of Beauvarnier,—a name which is now not without value to us as showing whence she derived the name she was ultimately known by, and which is still given her in encyclopædias and dictionaries of biography.

At the house of the Marquise de Duquesnoy, or at some similar haunt of blacklegs and demireps, the not too chaste Marguerite met her Mephistopheles, the tempter who was to introduce her to "the heights of harlotry and rascaldom"—the Comte Jean Baptiste du Barry. He was at that time about forty years of age, for he was twenty years older than Jeanne "Beauvarnier" as we must now call her. He was of a good family, and his father, Antoine du Barry, was a gallant soldier who had fought in the wars of Louis XIV, and had taken part in the battles of Hochstedt, Lille, Malplaquet, and Denain.² Antoine du Barry left three sons, of whom Jean Baptiste was the

¹ Now Rue du Louvre.

² The Du Barrys claimed relationship with the house of Barrymore. The arms of both families were the same. The Du Barrys were an old and hitherto respectable family. Pidansat's statement that Comte (!) du Barry was the son of the watchman of a vineyard is on a par with the rest of his book.

eldest, and three or four daughters. The family estates, or what there were left of them, were at Lévignac, near Toulouse, and there Comte Jean du Barry lived till his vices and the scandals he created caused him to come to Paris, in 1756. He was in hopes of securing a diplomatic appointment, and he succeeded in getting two Ministers to entrust him with foreign missions but executed both so badly that the Duc de Choiseul refused to employ him again. By dint of endless importunity he managed to secure—possibly from the Duc de Duras, an easy-going man who was said never to refuse anything to anybody—a contract for the supply of provisions to the island of Corsica, and this contract he leased out, or sold. His life was devoted to debauchery, and in the six or seven years he had been in Paris he had managed to acquire the nickname of the *Roué*—a distinction not easily earned in those days. Gambling then was looked upon rather as a gentlemanly accomplishment than as a vice, and as a matter of course Jean du Barry was a confirmed gambler. It would not seem unjust to him, considering his character, to infer that he turned the king more frequently than is consistent with ordinary luck, and more often threw “nicks” than “crabs.” Mademoiselle Beauvarnier, he, no doubt, thought would make an excellent lure for the pigeons who were to be plucked. She, it may easily be believed, was by no means averse to become his mistress, for like Catiline he was *alienum appetens, sui profusus*, and had the reputation of being very liberal to women, who were all fond of him.¹ He was said to cover them with gold and diamonds, which, considering his means, must have been a figure of speech.

¹ *La Police dévoilée*, Vol. 1, page 231.

It must have been towards the end of 1764 that Mademoiselle Beauvarnier was installed in Comte du Barry's house as his mistress. In the Police journal for that year there is an entry under the date of 14th December, that there was present at the Théâtre des Italiens the previous night, "a young woman, nineteen years of age, tall, well made, elegant in appearance, and very pretty, said to be Mademoiselle Beauvarnier, the mistress of Comte du Barry." The ballet played on that occasion was somewhat appropriately "Ulysses in the Island of Circe." The entry serves partly to prove that Mademoiselle Beauvarnier was not "known to the police," or this description of her would have been quite unnecessary. It is noticeable too that her name appears here as Beauvarnier, but soon afterwards it underwent another and final change. Jean du Barry does not appear to have liked the name of Beauvarnier, so he changed the relative positions of the *b* and the *v* and transformed it into Vaubarnier. She afterwards prefixed to it Gomard—the name of the Abbé who claimed to be her uncle—and was known, and is even unto this day described in many historical works, as Marie Jeanne Gomard de Vaubarnier. In later years she also invented an ancestor to bear the name, and in several legal documents is described as "the daughter of Gomard de Vaubarnier, employed in the King's service," which has caused the erroneous statement, to be found in all English and German works of reference, that she was the daughter of one Vaubarnier, a clerk in the Excise or Customs department.

Of her life during the four years or more that she was Du Barry's mistress we have few particulars. Pidansat and his fellows make out that she was miserable, that Jean du

Barry often locked her in a room, ill-treated her, and abused her, and that at least on one occasion she was going to throw herself out of the window. Jean du Barry was a heartless scoundrel and an unprincipled rogue; he had seduced several girls, and had even gone so far as to give one of his victims, Therese Banto, a paper, which is still extant, promising to marry her on the death of his wife, but he was not likely to ill-treat a woman, especially a woman who was useful to him. He required a pretty and clever accomplice, all smiles and cajolery, whose winning ways would make a poor pigeon think that being plucked was a quite enjoyable process. A morose, silent, red-eyed woman would have been of no use in furthering his plans. Her behaviour to him, when she was at the height of her power, proves at least that she bore him no animosity, but on the contrary she showed gratitude to him for his share in promoting her fortunes, followed his counsels, and satisfied his rapacious demands without a murmur.

Nor is there any ground for assuming that she was unfaithful to her "protector." Scandal has attributed to her half a dozen lovers, amongst whom were Sainte Foix, an old admirer, now Chief Clerk in the Foreign Office, M. d'Arcambal, and Comte de Fitz James, "a charming young man," who was none the better for having the blood of James II in his veins, but who at least showed better taste in the matter of women than his royal relative. If there was any intrigue between Mademoiselle Vaubarnier and any, or all of these adorers, it was certainly with the knowledge and tacit consent of Jean du Barry.

What little we do hear of Jeanne Vaubarnier during this period would show that she was happy and contented. She drove about in a "chariot," and was always accom-

panied by two children, "who were certainly not her own," says the chronicler, "but who were very well-behaved according to the evidence of the tradesmen with whom she dealt." They were not Jean du Barry's children either, for he had only one son, a boy of about fifteen. It may be mentioned *en passant* that Madame du Barry was always very fond of children, though she never had any of her own, and it is a slight but not unimportant testimony in her favour that children and dogs, who are proverbially said never to flatter, always "took to her."

She was also not without friends, and if exception may be taken to their character it should be recollected that few virtuous women were likely to care to make the acquaintance of the mistress of a notorious *roué*. One of her friends, the Comtesse La Rena, lived at the Hotel Perou, Rue Jacob. She is described in the Journal of the Lieutenant of Police ¹ "as a married woman living apart

¹The Lieutenant of Police at this time was M. de Sartines, a very able man, who had brought the police of Paris to a high state of efficiency. Many stories are told about the wonderful skill displayed by his detectives. The Vienna Police once wrote to M. de Sartines, asking him to arrest a certain swindler who had left Vienna, and was believed to be in Paris. De Sartines wrote back that the man had not left Vienna but was living there in a certain house in a certain street; he also described the man's dress, and mentioned the hours at which he usually left home and returned. The Vienna Police went to the place indicated and found the man they wanted. Another story is that one of the chief magistrates of Lyons made a bet with M. de Sartines that he (the magistrate) would come to Paris and remain several days without the lieutenant of police knowing anything about it. He allowed some months to elapse, then left Lyons secretly, and came to Paris rapidly and quietly. When near the capital he sent away his post-chaise,

from her husband, and having an income of about twenty-five thousand francs a year, derived from gallantries, principally from Milord Marche, who had conceived a violent passion for her, and had lived seven years with her in England. At Paris she is intimately acquainted with Mademoiselle Beauvarnier, the mistress of the Sieur du Barry." The Milord Marche mentioned in this paragraph, was William Douglas, third earl of March, and afterwards fourth Duke of Queensberry.

Middle-aged Londoners may have heard their fathers speak of "that polished, sin-worn fragment of the Court," who was popularly known as "Old Q," for he did not die until Christmas 1810. Lord Hertford, writing to Horace Walpole, says that Lord March had "a genteel passion" for a lady here (Paris), but it was not of a compromising nature for the lady was married; and in a letter written to George Selwyn in December 1766, Lord March states that he has received a letter from La Jondina¹ who says that she has never enjoyed a winter in Paris so much, for that M. du Barry has taken her to several balls. Jeanne Vaubarnier must often have met Lord March at the Hotel de Perou, and the acquaintance between them lasted many years. In 1791—when she was in England about the robbery of her jewels—Horace Walpole saw Madame du Barry at Queensberry House, and it is affirmed

disguised himself as a workman, entered Paris early in the morning, and took lodgings in a poor part of the town. In an hour or two he received an invitation to breakfast with M. de Sartines. It seems impossible to believe that Jeanne Vaubarnier, if she had been notoriously vicious, could long have escaped the notice of such a well-organized police.

¹ The surname of the Comtesse La Rena.

that the "Old even green Duke" (*sic*) as M. Charles Vatel terms "Old Q" took her to Windsor and introduced her to the King. M. Vatel thinks that if Jeanne Vaubarnier had been as coarse and vulgar as her detractors assert, she would never have enjoyed the friendship of the Comtesse La Rena, nor would she have been admitted to the intimacy of Lord March, "one of the most refined gentlemen of his age!—a king of fashion, with a passion for the elegancies of life, and contempt for everything that was not in the very best taste." Whatever might have been the case with the Comtesse, Lord March would probably have pardoned anything in a pretty woman,—whilst, in the matter of language, Raikes says that "he swore like ten thousand troopers," and he had not the reputation of being too particular in other respects.

Another friend of Mademoiselle Vaubarnier's was the Demoiselle Legrand, a pretty young woman who affected literary society, and whose house was frequented by Crébillon *filz*, Collé, Favier, Guibert,¹ and other wits. Dumouriez describes her as the friend and companion of the future Madame du Barry, and quotes a remark she made that "if she did not have the fortune of Du Barry it was because she was too witty for Versailles." In the company of these ladies Mademoiselle Vaubarnier seems to have spent most of her afternoons. In the evenings she presided at the Comte du Barry's table and made herself agreeable to his guests. According to Senac de Meilhan it was considered good form by the young men about town "to have supped, at least, with her." The amusement must have been more pleasant than profitable, and Jean du Barry

¹ *La Vie du General Dumouriez*, Vol. I, page 170.

must have congratulated himself upon the success of his lure.

This life continued till the spring of 1768, when a great event which shaped the destiny of Jeanne Vaubarnier happened. How the King first heard of her charms is not very clear. The anecdotists assert that Jean du Barry went to Le Bel, the King's valet, who spent his life in pandering to his master's vices, and proposed that he should introduce Jeanne to the King. Le Bel saw her, and was fascinated by her beauty. He arranged a little supper party at which she was to be present with the Duc de Richelieu and one or two other equally disreputable courtiers, whilst the King was to be in the next room, a small hole having been made in the wall in order that he might see and hear all that went on.

Richelieu and the others plied her with champagne until she became utterly reckless, and the King was so enraptured by her charms—which under the influence of the champagne she displayed lavishly—and astonished at her language—which was utterly new to him—that he sent for the enchantress the next day (some say the same night) and remained under her thrall until the day of his death. M. Emile Gaboriau, who, before he knew where his real strength lay, dabbled in history, makes out that the King was present at the supper under the name of the Baron de Gonesse, but the novelist is too obviously evident in his work, and his book is more amusing than trustworthy.¹ In another account the supper still figures, and the King is an unseen spectator, but Sainte Foix takes the place of Richelieu.

Such an arrangement, if it ever did take place, would have been consonant with the character and the aspira-

¹ EMILE GABORIAU, *Les Cotillons célèbres*.

tions of Jean du Barry. He was well acquainted with the King's character, and there is reason to believe had some years previously tried to provide Louis with a mistress—not from any disinterested motives. "I went one day," says Madame de Hausset, in her interesting *Memoirs*, "to the comedy at Compiègne, and Madame (Pompadour) having put some questions to me about the piece, asked me if there were many people present, and if I saw there a very pretty girl. I replied that there was in a box near me a young person who was surrounded by all the young courtiers. She smiled and said, 'That was Mademoiselle Dorothee; she was at the King's supper to-night, and will be at the hunt to-morrow. You are astonished to see that I am so well informed, but I know still more. She was brought here by a Gascon whose name is Du Barré or Du Barri, and who is the greatest rascal there is in France. He founds his hopes upon the charms of Mademoiselle Dorothee, which he thinks the King will not be able to resist. She is really very pretty. I was able to examine her whilst she was in my garden where they brought her under pretext of taking a stroll. She is the daughter of a water-carrier of Strasburg, and her charming adorer asks, to begin with, to be made ambassador at Cologne.'"

Mademoiselle Dorothee's aspirations were nipped in the bud—most likely by Madame de Pompadour—and Jean du Barry did not become ambassador. Unfortunately Madame de Hausset never dated her *historiettes* and we do not know in what year it was that Mademoiselle Dorothee's charms were exhibited to the King. But in 1768 Madame de Pompadour had been dead four years and Louis XV was not under the sway of the imperious mistress who, if she was willing to encourage him in transient amours, was careful to prevent

any younger and fresher rival from ousting her from her place.

In justice to Jean du Barry, who has not so much to his credit that he can afford to lose any favourable testimony, it should be said that several writers whose evidence is unimpeachable, regard the story of the supper as a fable. Madame Sara Goudard—who is perhaps not an over trustworthy witness—declares that the King glanced at Mademoiselle Vaubarnier in a crowd, and was deeply impressed, but he lost sight of her and ordered Le Bel to find her again. The statement is confirmed by Montigny, who says, “Her radiant beauty struck Louis XV, and the monarch instructed Le Bel, his *valet de chambre*, to find out who she was. The event was not prepared.” In a letter which Jean du Barry wrote to M. de Malesherbes, the Minister of the Household of Louis XVI, he asks permission to visit Paris for the purpose of seeing “his doctor, his oculist, and his creditors!” In order to secure this favour he enters into an explanation as to his share in the introduction of Mademoiselle Vaubarnier to the late King. His words are, “I ceded to Madame Rançon and Mademoiselle Vaubarnier, her daughter, the interest I had in the provisioning of Corsica, which they enjoyed for several months. Fresh arrangements on the part of M. de Choiseul deprived them of this source of income, and they solicited the continuance of the contract. It was in the course of the several journeys they made to Versailles that Mademoiselle Vaubarnier attracted the attention of the King. Le Bel received his orders, and he—with whom neither she nor I was personally acquainted—arranged the matter with her alone.”

This letter was not made public till many years after, and therefore partly confirms the statements just quoted.

The Duc de Choiseul also mentions, in his *Memoirs*, that Mademoiselle Vaubarnier called on him on some business (the Minister's offices were then at Versailles) but that as she was not very pretty, and appeared to be a provincial, he referred her to some subordinate. Anyone who obtained admission to the Château of Versailles would have half a dozen opportunities a day of seeing the King, who, when he was stared at, stared back again, and if he saw a fair, fresh young face in the crowd, would order Le Bel to bring its owner to his room—a commission which that despicable old sleuth-hound of vice generally performed faithfully.

A few words may here be given to refute an absurd statement made by the Duc de Choiseul in his *Memoirs*, about Le Bel's death. A very few days after the Comtesse du Barry became the recognised mistress of the King, Le Bel died, and the Duc de Choiseul says there is some ground for believing that he was poisoned by Madame du Barry because he had endeavoured to dissuade the King from taking a mistress of such low birth. He may be pardoned for feeling sore, for, no doubt he had been liberally rewarded for each fresh victim he had brought to the royal Moloch, and now his occupation—beastly and degrading, but extremely profitable—was gone. Naturally he would do his best to persuade the King to send Madame du Barry back to her simulacrum of a husband, or to her brother-in-law and "protector." But it is impossible to believe that Madame du Barry poisoned him for this. If she had compassed the death of all who spoke against her she would have needed all the arsenic in Europe, and the Duc de Choiseul would have been one of the first to meet with a violent death. As Le Bel had exceeded the allotted

span of life, and had almost completed his seventy-second year at the time of his death, Madame du Barry may be exonerated from this odious and absurd charge.

In whatever manner the interview between the King and Mademoiselle Vaubarnier was arranged, when it did take place it fully justified the hopes of Jean du Barry. Louis XV was at once fascinated and his infatuation lasted till the end of his life. Whether he was subjugated by her personal charms or by her manners it would be impossible to say. One chronicler states that very shortly after Mademoiselle Vaubarnier paid her first visit to Versailles, the old Duc de Richelieu asked the king "what he could see in this woman that he should fix upon her rather than any other?"

"She is the only woman in France," replied the King, "who has found the secret of making me forget that I am a sexagenarian."¹

The writer of the *Précis* appears to feel an acute surprise that the old Marechal de Richelieu was not sent to immediate execution for having asked such a question, and she (for we believe the book was compiled by a woman) puts a very animal and sensual construction on the king's reply. The story seems rather apocryphal. If the Marechal de Richelieu had introduced Jeanne Becu to the king, as several of the anecdotists assert, why was he astonished? and in any case there is a chronological difficulty to be surmounted. If he put this blunt, straightforward question to the King in 1768, directly after the King first saw his mistress, Louis XV. was then only fifty-eight years of age, and he was not the sort of man to call himself a sexagenarian before he had a right to the name.

¹ *Précis historique*, p. 40.

On the other hand, if the question were put in 1770, Madame du Barry had then been the Royal mistress for nearly two years, and the query came rather late in the day.

Most probably the two attributes of Madame du Barry which made the greatest impression on the king were her light-hearted *nonchalance*, and her utter want of respect for his rank. He was—as Madame de Maintenon said of Louis XIV, and Talleyrand said of Napoleon—an “unamusable” man. From his boyhood he had been sullen, silent, and moody; incapable of devising pleasures for himself, and finding no amusement in those which were devised for him. When he hunted it was time, not the stag, that he wanted to kill. Added to this he was regarded and treated as a demi-god. He moved amidst his courtiers, isolated, feared, and, during his latter years, despised.

The Queen he rarely saw, nor was her company calculated to dispel *ennui* when he did visit her; his daughters scuttled out of his presence, like frightened hares, at the first convenient opportunity. He may be said to have spent his life in a search for sympathy, and the nearest approach to it that he ever found was a similarity of taste in vice. To the *blasé*, old King, saturated with adulation, and worn out by vice, a nature like that of Jeanne Becu seemed unaccountable. She was merry and happy, and though “she had been sold and resold since her infancy, she either ignored all that, or had forgotten it. She was born to please the world, and to love all mankind, and was the incarnation of joy.”¹ She cared no more for

¹ Michelet, *History of France*, Vol. XIX, p. 162.

Court-etiquette than she did for the good nuns who taught her, and she laughed as merrily, and even more unconstrainedly, in the salons of Versailles as she had in the dormitory at the Convent of Sainte Aure, and cared no more for the King's frown than she did for a scolding from the Abbess.

This unaffected fearlessness further strengthened the power she had over him. He wanted to feel that he could sometimes throw aside his state robes and be plain Louis de Bourbon, but kings can seldom come down from their pedestal, and when they do they are as dull, and perhaps as dangerous, as the statue of the Commandant. With Madame du Barry Louis XV could be natural, because she was natural, and he was under no apprehension that he might lose his dignity, for in her eyes he had none to lose. Even after she acquired "Society manners" she preserved, in her private intercourse with the King, that easy familiarity which so pleased him.

Besides all these attractions her beauty was of a type to which he had not been accustomed. "All the portraits and documents agree in giving Du Barry the rarest fascinations of woman, the enchantments of an unrivalled grace. Her hair was fine, long, and silky, and of that *blond cendré* which, without the aid of powder, gives a sweetness and delicious harmony to the face, which was both bright and pensive. As a charming contrast, she had brown eyebrows, and long curved brown eyelashes, which set off the tender gleam of her blue eyes—eyes which only the pencil of a Greuze could depict. Both types of beauty were united in her face in a delightful manner, for the tender passion of the blonde was mingled with the ardent smile of the brunette.

"Then there was a little Greek nose, finely chiselled,

62 *The Life and Times of Madame du Barry*

and the bent bow of a tiny mouth. The complexion of her pure, oval face was like that of an infant. Her neck seemed the round neck of an antique statue lengthened by the Parmesan¹ in order to balance more daintily on her rounded shoulders. Arm, hand, foot, and body were of adorable perfection, and besides all these charms she had victorious youth, the life and, as it were, the divinity of Hebe, and around her that air of voluptuousness, that atmosphere of intoxication, that perfume and light of the amorous goddess which caused Voltaire to say of one of her portraits, 'the original was intended for the gods.' Like the divinities of fable all metamorphoses suited her beauty, and if to-morrow she quitted the Court dress of Versailles for a hunting costume, if she assumed a man's habit with large revers trimmed with Honiton lace, which showed her bare neck, if she wore her hair flat, and two or three patches thrown here and there showed off her roguish dimples, she was the impersonation of Venus at the chase.²"

This description, though a good specimen of fine writing, is too overloaded with epithets to give a really good account of the beauty of Madame du Barry. Many of the expressions used are meaningless or absurd if examined critically, though they sound pretty and poetical to the general reader who takes them in his stride. As a companion, or contrast, to this we may take the pen picture of Madame du Barry, by one of the greatest masters of French prose, Mirabeau, who has drawn her in the *Galerie des dames nationales*, under the name of Elmira.

¹ Antonio Allegri, usually called Correggio.

² E. ET J. DE GONCOURT: *Les Maîtresses du Roi*.

"Elmira was endowed by nature with an assortment of all beauties, which are rarely found united in the same individual, from the superb locks, of the most beautiful shade, with which she was plentifully provided, to feet that were modelled by the hands of the Graces. An easy, graceful bearing, a well-shaped figure, and arms of perfect roundness, terminated by delicately shaped hands."

A less ornate, but fairly graphic description of Madame du Barry is also to be found in the *Memoirs* of the Prince de Ligne. "She is tall, well-made, *blonde à ravir*, an easy air, fine eyes and eyebrows to match; an oval face with little moles upon the cheek which only render her more beautiful, an aquiline nose, a laughing mouth, clear skin, and a bosom that disregarded fashion, and challenged other bosoms to a comparison they would have been well-advised to decline.¹"

One or two voices alone do not join in this general chorus of adulation. The Duc de Choiseul thought her only a troublesome countrywoman, but it is possible that he penned that description after his sister had caused him to declare war to the knife against the Royal mistress. Horace Walpole, too, in one of his letters says that he should never have thought her pretty, but by his own account he had a very imperfect view of her, for he saw her in the Chapel Royal at Versailles, and he was in the gallery whilst she was in the nave, and removed from him by almost the entire length of the chapel.

Some doubt exists as to the exact date at which Louis XV made the acquaintance of his mistress. The anecdotists, who generally copy one another, place the

¹ Quoted in *Le Duc de Lauzun*, by G. MAUGRAS - 212.

first meeting about the middle of July 1768. It certainly must have been prior to the August of that year, for Le Bel died then, and according to the account they agree in giving, he played no inconsiderable part in the affair. If it occurred on July 15—the date usually given—Louis XV had been a widower exactly three weeks, as the Queen Marie Leeczinska, died on June 25. Virtually, however she had been dead to him for some years, and there is nothing extraordinary in a man so intensely selfish, and inordinately depraved as he was, taking a mistress a few days after the wife to whom he had been married forty-three years, had been laid in her grave.

A fairly conclusive proof that the first meeting between the King and his future mistress occurred in July is furnished by the date of Mademoiselle Vaubarnier's marriage, which was September 1. According to the story as related by Pidansat de Mairobert and others, Le Bel when he found that matters did not turn out as he had anticipated, and that the King's passion, far from being a transient one, was likely to prove permanent, repented his share in the transaction, fell at the King's feet, and declared that the new mistress was not a woman of quality, and was not even married!

"So much the worse," cried the King. "Let a husband be found for her at once, so that I may not have the chance of making a fool of myself."

If this story rested on any good authority it would prove that the King was already so enamoured of the new favourite, that he was afraid he might be tempted to make her his wife instead of his mistress, but it seems more likely that the story was invented to fit the facts. The reply, if ever made, must have convinced Le Bel that a new star

had risen, and that in all probability his services would never be needed again, and this blow may have hastened his death, which occurred in the course of the next month.

Mademoiselle Vaubarnier returned to Paris to prepare for her marriage, and to listen to the wise counsels of her astute ex-protector and future brother-in-law, who on his part was preparing for the great struggle, for he knew full well that the news that the King had chosen a fresh mistress would be the signal for all the jealousy, hatred, and malice of the courtiers to break forth, and that it would need all his skill and cunning to bring his *protégée* safe into the harbour of the King's favour. The stakes were worth playing for, and he won the game.

Book the Second

ELEVATION

Though

This King were great, his greatness was no guard
To bar heaven's shaft, but sin had his reward.

SHAKESPEARE.



CHAPTER I

HIS MOST CHRISTIAN MAJESTY

Few monarchs have ever succeeded better than Louis XV in losing the love of their people, for he frittered away, in the comparatively short period of some twenty years, all the prestige which belonged to the great-grandson of the great Monarch. Yet few princes ever succeeded to a throne under better auspices. The nation was heartily sick of the long Regency and all its vices, weakness, and political chicanery, and the accession of the golden-haired lad who was, says d'Argenson, "as beautiful as Eros," was hailed with a fervour which was almost astonishing even in such an impressionable and excitable people as the French.

The mother of the late Regent, the Duc d'Orleans, said of her son, that, at his birth, the fairies had bestowed upon him every good gift, but that one spiteful fairy had decreed that he should never be able to make use of them. Of Louis XV the very opposite may be said. He had every opportunity of proving himself a great King, but wisdom, prudence, courage, virtue, and even happiness were denied him. He was even deprived of external assistance. Many weak or vicious princes have been able to call to their aid statesmen and soldiers whose good

qualities redeemed their master's faults either in the cabinet or in the field. To Louis XV this was denied; his Ministers were shallow, selfish, and unprincipled, and his Generals had little to show against the loss of Canada and almost all the French colonies both in the East- and West-Indies, and the crushing defeats of Minden and Rosbach, but a trifling and unexpected success at Minorca, and a dearly bought victory over "Butcher" Cumberland, who, as Carlyle says, "was beaten by everyone who ever tried."

Even the vices by which Louis XV is best known were not of his own seeking. His name is almost synonymous with selfishness and lust, but how could he fail to be selfish when brought up under the care of such a past master in vice as Cardinal Fleury, and had a mistress "prescribed" for him as a kind of anodyne to prevent his energy developing in the unfavourable form of politics? Under the care of the shifty egoist Fleury, the young King grew into a sullen silent youth. The companions selected for the Royal school-boy—Epernon, La Trémouille, and de Gesvres,—were effeminate, sickly-minded youths who gave the young King a taste for cooking and embroidery, and perhaps taught him worse things still. The Duc de Bourbon gave him a taste for field sports, but though Louis hunted all his life, he was never a sportsman, though he is said to have been present at the death of three thousand stags in seventeen years—an average of about one every other day including Sundays.

When he was fifteen it was judged time that he should get married, and the selection of a wife for him was entrusted to Madame de Prie, the mistress of the Duc de Bourbon. The only two damsels of suitable age and position

were Mademoiselle de Vermandois and Maria Lecszinska. The first named was the daughter of the late Regent. Madame de Prie called upon her in disguise, and Mademoiselle Vermandois, not knowing her interlocutor, spoke so disparagingly of the mistress of the Duc de Bourbon, that Madame de Prie left hurriedly, declaring, "*She* should never be Queen of France."

Maria Lecszinska was the daughter of a "monarch retired from business," Stanislas, the last King of Poland, who after he was driven from the throne, had settled down at Weissembourg in Alsace. She was twenty-two years of age—seven years older than her affianced husband—and so poor that her hand had been already refused, on that account, by a colonel in the French army. When the envoy arrived with an offer of marriage from the King of France she and her father fell on their knees and thanked heaven—not for a good man's love, as the issue proved but too well. Every article of her *trousseau* had to be bought for her, even down to her gloves—with many grumblings on the part of old Fleury.

The marriage took place at Fontainebleau, on September 4, 1725. She was about as ill-fitted as she could have been to become the wife of Louis XV, and only the very limited selection at the disposal of Madame de Prie excused her choice. Maria Lecszinska would have made an excellent *häuß-frau* for a German baron, but was never meant to play the Queen at Versailles. She was pious, and never travelled without a skull which she called her *gentil mignon*, and she was intensely "proper"; and she was called upon to preside at a Court where immorality was exalted almost to a religion, and religion

was regarded as immorality. *Ennui* had seized upon Louis XV even long before he was married, and it was not likely to be dissipated by companionship with a young woman whose highest idea of enjoyment was dull conversation with decorous dowagers, and interminable games of *cavagnole*—a pastime very much resembling the game of *lotto* which good little girls sometimes play at now.

Although she was dull and homely, Louis XV seems to have been sincerely attached to his wife. She bore him a number of children, and was, at first, such a good wife that he forgot she was a wet blanket, and is said to have thought her even pretty. This, though, is rather a moot point. Whenever the beauties of a Court lady were extolled in his hearing, Louis was accustomed to ask, "Is she as pretty as the Queen?" but historians differ as to how the phrase was intended. Michelet says the words were used ironically, but the great majority of writers think the question was asked in good faith. The most probable hypothesis is that the King did not care which meaning was attached to his words, but that he enjoyed seeing the confusion of the unlucky courtier to whom the question was put, and who would be embarrassed to find a suitable answer.

After they had been married ten years, the Queen—either tired of continual child-bearing, or acting on the advice of her confessor that she should war against the lusts of the flesh—began to refuse to see the King when he came to her rooms at night. The result might have been foreseen. Old Fleury saw his opportunity and profited by it. On one of these occasions when Louis returned to his room, annoyed by the Queen's refusal to see him, he found a masked lady awaiting him. He

bowed her out, but a few nights later she was there again. He was shy and nervous, but his valet "threw him into her arms," and Louis had taken the first step in that downward course which culminated in the *Parc aux Cerfs*.

The principal persons who were entrusted with the task of foisting a mistress on the King, were Mademoiselle de Charolais (a great grand-daughter of the celebrated Condé, and daughter of the Duc de Bourbon) and the Marechal de Richelieu. They selected Madame de Mailly to fill the much coveted place. Madame de Mailly belonged to a good family—the De Nesles—who were very poor. She was married to her cousin, M. de Mailly, and they were said to "keep house on hunger and thirst." She was at this time a lean brunette, thirty years of age, her only beauty being her large dark eyes, which could light up with passion. She also affected a "sweet neglect" in her loosely flowing robes, which was as taking to the King as it was to the poet. The reasons which led to her selection were not her personal charms, but her thoughtless and unselfish character. She never asked for money—indeed Fleury kept the King very short—although she was so poor. Once when Louis made a playful assertion that she had taken bribes from suitors to press their claims, she insisted on every person who had heard the accusation making a declaration that they did not believe it.

Richelieu also led the King into the dissipation of supper parties, at which they all drank themselves under the table. At these suppers the King and the Prince de Dombes made omelettes which the guests were expected to eat with approval. The *liaison* with Madame de Mailly had lasted six years when her younger sister—Félicité de

Nesle—came to Court, and was also admitted to the King's favour. Louis felt some compunction about the two sisters, and in a fit of religious remorse, refused to take the Communion at Easter. The King's confessor, the Jesuit Lemer, proposed that Louis should communicate *en blanc*, that is to say, eat an unconsecrated wafer, an abominable suggestion for which he was very properly exiled. A husband was found for Felicité de Nesle in the person of the Count de Vintimille, a nephew of the Archbishop of Paris. He was, as might be expected, a cynical profligate, utterly devoid of any sense of honour. He is reported to have said loudly as he, in his capacity of gentleman-in-waiting, handed the King his *chemise* one night, "After all he only has two ugly women."

Madame de Vintimille died of a fever, and the third sister, Madame de Laraguais took her place. Finally the King was attracted by the charms of the fourth sister, Madame de la Tournelle. She differed from the others in being really beautiful, whereas they were barely to be considered good-looking, and she also differed from them in character, being of a haughty and imperious disposition. She refused to become the Royal mistress unless she had the rank of a Duchess, and insisted on the dismissal from Court of her eldest sister Madame de Mailly. The first of these requests was easy enough and Madame de la Tournelle at once became the Duchesse de Châteauroux: the latter demand was not difficult for one of the selfish nature of the King. The Duchesse de Châteauroux was young and beautiful;—Madame de Mailly had never been pretty and was perilously near forty, and he did not feel the slightest regret at getting rid of her. Madame de Laraguais, who appears only to have been a sort of supplementary mistress, was

permitted by her imperious younger sister to remain.

For two years (1742 to 1744) the Duchesse de Châteauroux continued to rule her royal lover. To weaken her influence, Maupertuis, who was then Minister, persuaded the King, in the latter year, to join his army, but stipulated that "all women should be left behind." The King consented, and started off to "prosecute conquests in Flanders," but in a very little time he tired of camp life, the ineradicable *ennui* took possession of him again, and very shortly "he had his unblushing Châteauroux, with her band-boxes and rouge-pots at his side; so that, at every new station a wooden gallery must be run up between their lodgings.¹"

At Metz the King was taken dangerously ill with a fever, and as he "had religious faith—believed at least in a Devil," and was given over by his doctors, the clergy were sent for and refused to give him absolution so long as his mistresses were with him. The Bishop of Metz succeeded in wringing from Louis permission to dismiss Châteauroux and Laraguais, and going into the antechamber, where they were waiting, said, "The King orders you, mesdames, to leave his house at once," and the royal concubines, "driven forth by sour shavelings," had to fly with "wet cheeks and flaming hearts."

Sympathy for the King in his dangerous illness was expressed on all sides. "For many days," says Voltaire, "Paris took no heed of the appointed times for sleep, for waking, or for taking food. All prayed for him." He was cured by an enormous dose of emetic, administered by a quack doctor, and when he recovered asked wonderingly, "What have I done to be so loved?"

¹ CARLYLE: *French Revolution*, Book I. Chap. 2.

As soon as he was well, he returned to Paris and—Châteauroux. One night in November, 1744, she was astonished to see him enter her house in the Rue du Bac, fall at her feet, and implore her to return to him. Indeed she was so astonished that for some minutes she was unable to speak, but when she did regain the use of her tongue she rated him soundly, and refused to see him again until all the persons concerned in driving her away were exiled or disgraced. Maupertuis, being extremely useful to the King, she allowed to remain, on condition that he should bring her an abject written apology. Louis agreed to all the conditions, and the old Minister, who was determined to keep his place, called upon her with the apology she demanded. She snatched the paper from him, and cried, "Give it me—and then get out."

The mental excitement caused by her unexpected disgrace, and still more unexpected triumph, brought on an attack—probably of heart disease—and she died on December 1, after an illness of eleven days, in the arms of Madame de Mailly, the sister upon whose dismissal from Court she had once insisted. She was buried at the Church of St. Sulpice, and a body of soldiers under arms was present to prevent the populace from carrying away her body and burning it.

Madame de Mailly spent the rest of her life in penance. She visited prisons, attended the sick, washed the feet of the poor, and denied herself everything but the bare necessities of life in order that she might give her money to the poor. On one occasion when she entered the Church of St. Paul and St. Louis, some of the people who knew her cleared a passage for her, which caused a bystander to cry, "What a lot of trouble for a loose

woman." She meekly replied, "Sir, as you seem to know me, pray for me." When she died, in 1751, she was found to be wearing a hair shirt next her skin.

Of the four sisters the only one for whom Louis really cared—if indeed he ever cared for anyone but himself—was Madame de Vintimille. After her death he is said to have remarked, "I shall never forget her till I am ninety—for I know I shall live to be that age." Yet in spite of this declaration it is doubtful if she remained as long in his memory as the haughty Châteauroux. It was unquestionably of the latter he was thinking when, more than twenty years afterwards, during the period between the death of Madame de Pompadour (1764) and the accession of Madame du Barry (1768) he replied to the Marechal de Richelieu, who was urging him to take another favourite, "I will never have another mistress who is of a good family—they cost too much to get rid of."

A few months after the death of the Duchesse de Châteauroux, Louis fell under the sway of Mademoiselle Poisson. This young woman had been carefully educated with a special view to the dishonourable post of King's mistress. She was supposed to be the daughter of a bankrupt speculator named Poisson, but a rich *fermier général* displayed an interest in her welfare from her very earliest years, expended large sums on her education, and finally married her to his nephew M. Lenormont d'Etiolles, from which it has been inferred that she was really his natural daughter. At any rate he was either a speculative philanthropist, or a philanthropic speculator, and little Mademoiselle Poisson was taught every accomplishment that was likely to aid her to catch, or keep, the King's favour. She

played, sang, drew, and danced "more gracefully than a respectable woman should," and was a fairly good amateur actress—though it was not on the boards that she acted most cleverly. She had an inherent aptitude for business, and to improve her mind, was allowed frequent opportunities of intercourse with all the best wits of the day.

Despite all the trouble that had been taken there seemed a possibility that she would fail in her ambition, for though she was sedulously thrown in the King's way, he took no notice of her. At length she did attract his attention, and a *liaison* which he doubtless intended to be a temporary one, began. If such were his intention it was by no means hers, and one night she rushed into his apartments at Versailles, declared that she was afraid to return home—on account of the wrath of her injured husband—and implored shelter. Louis ordered a suite of rooms above his own, and communicating with them, to be prepared for her reception, and never succeeded in shaking her off again, and Madame de Pompadour—the name of an extinct family which the King bestowed upon her—hardly ever quitted Versailles until worn out in body and mind by the task of governing France single-handed, she died there (though that privilege was supposed to be reserved for Royalty) nineteen years later.

Gradually Madame de Pompadour got all the strings of Government into her hands, and the King was one of the least important puppets she had to manage, though by far the most troublesome of them all. He allowed her to transact all the business of the realm, for he had a natural disinclination to perform any duty, for, as the Abbé Galiani said of him, "He had the worst trade in the world—that of a King—and he did it very much

against the grain." All that Louis asked from his mistress, in return for delegating his powers to her, was to be amused, but it must be owned that that was no light price to exact. If he came to see a ballet, on the preparation of which she had expended thousands of pounds and infinite trouble, he yawned and said, "I should have preferred a comedy," and she had the mortification of knowing that the formula would have been the same whatever was the nature of the entertainment provided. She had never a very firm hold on his affections, and as time weakened such sway as she had, she pandered to his vices, and became a procuress of the worst type. To her account must be set down all the nameless horrors of the Parc aux Cerfs. Not being naturally of an amorous disposition, she dosed herself with aphrodisiacs, but their principal effect was to give her pimples on the nose, nor did the "chocolate with amber, and triple vanilla" she took bring back the lost affection of her Royal protector. "I love that man with all my soul," she said, "and he only looks upon me as a *macreuse*"—a species of wild duck thought by the French to be particularly cold-blooded.

The difficulties of amusing the King and governing the Nation were too much for Madame de Pompadour. She never had a strong constitution, and in childhood had been troubled with spitting of blood. Before she had been two years at Versailles she was worn away to a skeleton, says one of her biographers, and weighed only a hundred and eleven pounds.¹ Her ambitious soul in

¹ The old French *livre* was rather less than the half kilo but rather more than the English pound. A hundred and eleven livres would be equal to about a hundred and nineteen and a half English pounds—which though a light weight for a woman is not absurdly light

"working out its way
Fretted the pygmy-body to decay,
And o'er inform'd the tenement of clay."

Nevertheless she continued this life for nineteen years. She died April 15, 1764, of physical and mental exhaustion. A few minutes before her death the curé of Versailles came to see her to administer spiritual consolation. When he was departing Madame de Pompadour said, "Wait one moment, Monsieur le Curé, and we will both leave together." The day of her funeral was wet and stormy. When the procession left Versailles amidst a pelting shower, Louis was looking out of the window, and drumming on the window-pane in sheer *ennui*. "Madame la Marquise has a bad day for her last journey," he remarked, and then he pulled out his watch and calculated at what time the procession would reach Paris.

During the four years that followed the death of Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV had no *maîtresse en titre*, but his life was as irregular as it had ever been. His boon companions were the old Maréchal de Richelieu and the Due d'Ayen, both cynical profligates who had studied vice as a fine art. Madame de Pompadour always hated Richelieu. She sent him to capture Minorca, and took care that he should have no besieging train, except scaling ladders that were several feet too short, but he disappointed her by returning victorious. He was therefore not likely to urge the King to take another mistress who might be as clever and ambitious as Pompadour, though he was prepared to support the claims of one who would play into his hands, and aid him in opposing the Duc de Choiseul, the Minister.

Choiseul seemed to think that his position was impreg-

nable, and that he was far too useful to the King to be lightly got rid of, for good Ministers were scarce and mistresses only too plentiful. He had already put down the pretensions of one lady who was striving for the post of *maîtresse en titre*. This was Madame d'Esparbes. She had very pretty hands, which the King delighted to fondle. Choiseul determined to nip the possible intrigue in the bud, and shortly afterwards, chancing to meet Madame d'Esparbes on the grand staircase, he took her chin in his hand, and looking her in the face said in a loud voice, and a bantering tone, "Well, little one, how is your business getting on?" She had no repartee ready, and only blushed and looked ridiculous, and to look ridiculous at Versailles was moral annihilation. The incident was of course duly reported to the King, who perhaps thought that he was being angled for, and not in the most adroit manner either. The same evening Madame d'Esparbes received a *lettre de cachet* ordering her not to appear at Court again, but to betake herself to Montauban, where her father, the Marquis de Lussan, lived. It is difficult to account for the conduct of Louis in this affair except on the ground that he did not care for Madame d'Esparbes and was glad of an excuse to get rid of her, or else possibly he was unwilling to find himself the object of intrigues and counter-intrigues on the part of his Minister and his mistress. There were no other noteworthy incidents in the career of Louis from that time until he met Madame du Barry, and his life after that falls within the scope of this history.

* * * * *

Louis XV has been described as an epitome of all the weaknesses of his time. He certainly did possess nearly every vice that was common to the period, and if there were a few of which he was not guilty, he replaced them by others which were peculiar to himself. His chief characteristic was an intense selfishness. This, of course, could not be called a general vice of the times, and was rather opposed in some respects to vices that were then very prevalent, such as the utter absence of conjugal honour. Selfishness could hardly be deemed an attribute of the time when it was considered "bad form" to have undisputed possession of one's own wife; nor is it compatible with indifference. The Queen was both plain and pious, and Louis was therefore never called upon to show what his conduct in that respect might be, but he certainly guarded his mistresses jealously, and showed thereby that he was free from one of the worst taints of the period.

To such a pitch had this want of honour in relation to the conjugal affections reached, that it is related that country gentlemen who came to Court, were ridiculed if they showed any affection for their wives or any jealousy concerning them. "To forbid your wife having lovers," said a courtier to a country gentleman, "is a mere eccentricity, and you would be laughed at all over Versailles," and he hummed two lines of a song,

If you don't know it,—it's nothing at all,
If you do know it,—it's little more.

"If your wife has a score of lovers, it means—for you—a score of charming women with whom you take your revenge." One of these philosophic husbands said to his

wife, when he found a young man in her bedroom under very suspicious circumstances, "Madam, how very imprudent on your part;—suppose you had been seen by anyone else!"

Even more cynical indifference was displayed by another who told his young and flighty wife, that "he allowed everything—except princes and lackeys." The thin veneer of etiquette which covered this huge bulk of immorality seems to the modern historian only to make it worse by showing that an outward decency could be preserved in small matters though it was neglected in the most essential ones.

From the irreligious feeling which was so common in his time, Louis XV was to a great extent free. He had a glimmering of conscience and—whenever he was dangerously ill—sent away his mistress for the time being, and determined to lead a better life—till his strength returned. But he was devoid of atheism and "philosophedom" at a time when both were rampant, and when even young girls boasted of being devoid of all religious superstitions. It is related that when a certain young lady lay dying, a priest was sent for to administer extreme unction, but he retired discomfited when she said to him almost with her last breath, "If I were well enough I might amuse myself with that trash, but just now I haven't the spirits."¹

With the men, this irreligion often proceeded from mere indolence or carelessness: they were so occupied with their debaucheries that they could not spare the time for other things. Of this sort was the Chevalier de Lorenzi. He called on one occasion on a lady, who at the end of the interview asked him to accompany her to Mass.

¹ M. GASTON MAUGRAS, *Le Duc de Lauzun*.

"What, do they still say it?" he asked, in unfeigned surprise. "I thought it had gone out of fashion." He explained that, as he hardly ever rose till late in the afternoon, he never saw the churches open, and as it was fifteen years since he had heard Mass, he had imagined that no mundane institution was likely to last that time, and that the services had been discontinued.

Others assumed an affectation of atheism, like the Marquis of Crequi-Canaples, to whose widow an old curé wrote, "I am very uneasy as to the salvation of his soul, but as the judgments of God are inscrutable, and the deceased had the honour to belong to your house," etc., etc.

If Morality and Religion languished, Justice was in little better case. Anyone who made any pretensions to Court interest could obtain a sheaf of *lettres de cachet* with no more difficulty than a prosperous City gentleman now experiences in getting a cheque book from his banker. Old Marquis Mirabeau, "crabbed old friend of Man," employed no fewer than fifty-four of these useful orders of incarceration for members of his own family, and at one time had his wife and all his children (with one exception) under lock and key, as he told someone who questioned him on the subject. "And," he added, seeing a look of horror on his interlocutor's face, "if you had the honour of belonging to my family you would be sent to join them." The mistress of the Duc de la Vrillière openly sold *lettres de cachet* at a fixed price, and did an extensive business. As a man could be sent to prison without any assigned, or assignable, reason, it logically followed there was no reason for taking him out again, and often he remained there till he died. One of the most flagrant instances of this arbitrary power of impri-

sonment was that of the unfortunate B——. He was a merchant of Lyons, and whilst on the road to Paris on business, overheard, at a little country inn, that Damiens was to attempt to kill the king. On his arrival in Paris he wrote to the Lieutenant of Police informing him of this, and suggesting that the assassin should be found and arrested. The Lieutenant took no notice of the communication, and a few days later Damiens "scratched the King slightly under the fifth rib." B——, having transacted his business, was at that time on his way back to Lyons, but the Lieutenant of Police had him pursued, brought back to Paris, and put in the Bastille, where he remained for eighteen years, till he was released by M. de Malesherbes in the early part of the reign of Louis XVI. The only reason for his detention was the fear that he might mention the letter he had written, and the Lieutenant of Police, having proved remiss in his duty, might have been cashiered or otherwise punished.¹

As for the common people, who were not worth putting in prison, the gallows was good enough for them, and to many of them it came as a happy release from a life of toil and starvation. Of all the sins of Louis XV, the greatest is that he speculated heavily in corn and made a profit out of the starvation of his people. Even he, case-hardened in heartlessness as he was, must have winced at that heavy blow from a blunt axe contained in the petition presented to him by the Parliament of Rouen. The Parliament was anxious to bring an action at law against a monopolist who had made a successful "corner" in wheat and reaped a large profit from the poor of Rouen.

¹ See Note A at end of Volume.

The law officers of Paris, shrewdly guessing that part of the profits went into the King's private purse, refused to allow any action to be taken, whereupon the Rouen Parliament petitioned the King for leave to prosecute the offender, and naïvely inserted at the end of the document—fearing lest their loyalty should be suspected—“God forbid, Sire, that we should intend you.”

The vices of Louis are easy enough to discern, for he took no pains to conceal them, but his virtues escape the most minute research, and the student is compelled to own that the character of Louis XV is completely summed up in Hamlet's description of his uncle.

“Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain.”

Deceit was an integral part of his nature; he practised it in his home life, and even took the trouble to send special emissaries to foreign Courts to establish secret relations with the different rulers. He gave orders to his Ministers and Ambassadors to pursue one line of policy, and secretly wrote to the Kings, or Empresses, to arrange a diametrically opposite line of conduct, and he seems to have done this for no earthly reason save to trouble and perplex the few servants who were faithful to the interests of France. The Comte de Broglie was sent to Vienna and Dresden with orders to oppose the designs of Russia, and at the same time the Chevalier Douglas was sent to St. Petersburg with orders to promise the Empress Elizabeth the support of the King of France in all her plans.

In private life his dissimulation was the same. A courtier would be invited to the King's supper, and chat affably with the King, and half an hour afterwards would be conveyed to the Bastille, or receive a *lettre de cachet* ordering him never to appear at the Court again. At the end of

the last interview he had with Madame de Mailly he came to the door of his cabinet and said in a loud voice that all the Courtiers might hear, "Adieu then, my dear Comtesse, till Tuesday next;—you will be sure not to keep me waiting," though he never intended to see her again, for her sister, the vain and haughty Châteauroux, had refused to become his mistress until Madame de Mailly was driven from the Court, and the King had instantly yielded to the demand. Morally and physically he was a craven, and dreaded a "scene" with a discarded mistress as much as he did a musket-bullet. To talk of Madame du Barry "corrupting" such a nature as his is utter nonsense, he was hopelessly and unutterably depraved and vicious when Jeanne Becu's little foolish head was concocting plans to tease the good nuns of the Convent of St. Aure. And if she did no harm to the King she did none to the Court either. Miss Julia Kavanagh states that, "In order to win a few favours, and pay their court to the monarch, Richelieu, and other old courtiers, entered, as they said themselves, on the ways of perdition, and relinquished that elegant phraseology for which they had been remarkable so long, in order to adopt the language which Madame du Barry had picked up amongst abandoned women and *chevaliers d'industrie*, the companions of her youth."¹

Old Richelieu had advanced a few stages along the way to perdition long before he ever heard of Madame du Barry, and if Miss Kavanagh had ever chanced to hear the "Conqueror of Minorca" when he had been jilted by one of his many mistresses, or after he had lost a few

¹ *Woman in France in the 18th Century*, Vol I, p. 303.

thousand crowns at lansquenet, she would have conceded that *any* change in his "elegant phraseology" must be for the better.

We shall at some length, in its proper place, examine the truth of this charge against Madame du Barry, but even granting it proved, it would be but fair to acknowledge that if she imported into Versailles the language and manners of abandoned women and *chevaliers d'industrie*, she must also have imported some of the better qualities of those classes, for as there are certain useful plants which will grow on a dunghill, there are certain virtues which may flourish in *bordels* and *tripots*, and yet be strange enough at Versailles. The few and unimportant good actions which marked the closing years of the reign of Louis XV, were entirely due to Madame du Barry, though it must be owned that when the King did, at her solicitation, right an injustice, or temper the severity of a condemnation, he was not actuated by any feelings of justice or mercy, but found his gratification in the happiness that beamed from the laughing blue eyes, and the smile that played round the enticing dimples of his fair and kind-hearted mistress.

CHAPTER II

THAT CONVENIENT CREATURE, A HUSBAND

COMTE JEAN DU BARRY, surnamed the *Roué*, and who might with equal truth have been named the *Rusé*, was not the sort of man to let an opportunity slip, and at once set to work to strengthen the position of his mistress. The first thing to be done was to procure her a husband, for it was evident that she could not reside at Versailles as Mademoiselle Vaubarnier, especially as she had figured in the Police Journal, where she was sarcastically described as the "milch cow of Comte Jean du Barry," under that name.

There were several good reasons why she should have a (nominal) husband, and we need not be driven back on the apocryphal story of the King requiring her to be married "lest he should make a fool of himself." It was a sort of unwritten law that the King's mistress should be, at least in name, a married woman, and even if the King had been inclined to waive the point, it was not desirable, from Jean du Barry's point of view, that she should fall into the hands of some needy and unscrupulous courtier who would give her his name, and, though he could not enjoy her charms, could enjoy the proceeds of them. Besides, the Court was about to move to Compiègne, where, on account of the more limited

accommodation, very few of the nobles could follow it. To have given a suite of rooms in this small palace to a pretty young woman of obscure birth, would have caused endless heart-burnings, bickering, and scandal, and Louis XV hated scandal,—not from any feeling of shame, for he was proof against that, but on account of the trouble and worry it gave him.

Having determined that a husband was necessary for his ex-mistress, the next thing Jean du Barry had to do was to settle who the husband was to be. He was, unfortunately for him, married already, though he was separated from his wife, and had a son nearly fifteen years old. In those days the law was not to be lightly trifled with, and had a short way with criminals and misdemeanants, bigamists included, which was simply to hang them off-hand. To entrust Mademoiselle Vaubarnier to a stranger was undesirable, for he must by the very nature of the case, be a scamp, and there was a danger that he would intercept all the Royal favours, and leave nothing for Comte Jean, who would have no remedy at law, and who would stand a very good chance of being hanged, or at least locked up for life, if he attempted to claim his "rights," since he could not well do so without bringing in the King's name.

Luckily for Comte Jean, he had a brother, Guillaume, who was not married. Guillaume resided at Toulouse, and called himself an officer of the Marines—the only body of men likely to believe the statement. He was an esurient rascal, with all the will to be as great a scoundrel as his brother, but lacking the capability, and obliged to be content with the meagre income derived from the family "estates" (half a score hovels), eked out perhaps

by the occasional proceeds of the plucking of a provincial pigeon.

Guillaume du Barry was informed by a letter from his brother that he must come to Paris at once on a matter of urgent business, and having a high respect for his brother's genius, he at once set out from Toulouse. As soon as he arrived in Paris, the nature of the proposed arrangement was made known to him. He was to marry Mademoiselle Vaubarnier, leave her at the church door, and never see her again, and he might rely upon it that his services would be well paid. Jean du Barry, in the letter which he wrote to M. de Malesherbes many years afterwards, states, "Before conducting Mademoiselle Vaubarnier to Compiègne, where the King then was, Le Bel wished her to appear as the wife of my brother, and to this arrangement I lent myself, out of blind and respectful obedience to the King." In all likelihood, Le Bel only stipulated that the young woman must be married, and it was Jean's objection to let such a good opportunity go out of the family which led to the selection of his brother as the bridegroom of his ex-mistress.

At all events Guillaume seems to have snatched eagerly at the chance, and a contract of marriage—which is still extant—was duly drawn up and signed by the parties concerned. The date it bears is July 23, 1768, from which it must be inferred either that the King's first acquaintance with Mademoiselle Vaubarnier must have been anterior to July 15, or that Jean du Barry had—of his own accord, or acting on the advice of his friend the Maréchal de Richelieu, who was a very good judge of what the King would like—sent for his brother before Mademoiselle Vaubarnier had attracted the attention of Louis.

The contract bears marks of the inventive talent of Jean du Barry. The parties to the deed are described so grandiloquently that they must have had a difficulty in recognising themselves under their exalted titles. Jeanne Becu appears as Jeanne Gomard de Vaubarnier, a minor—she was within a few days of completing her twenty-fifth year—the daughter of Anne Becu and a certain Vaubarnier, who is described as being occupied in the King's business.

Comte Guillaume is a high and mighty lord commanding a detachment of the King's Marines, and the *Roué* is Comte Barry Ceres, Governor of Levignac, etc., etc. (Levignac, says M. Vatel, is a tiny hamlet consisting of nine cottages). The body of the document is on a par with the preamble. The future wife is chargeable with the conduct of the household and all expenses connected with food, rent, servants' wages, table linen, care of equipments, keep of horses, education of children (!), etc., towards which expenses the husband is to contribute six thousand livres. The contracting parties must have smiled at this and the notary's wig have shaken with suppressed laughter, for that high and mighty lord Guillaume du Barry had never possessed six thousand livres or anything approaching that sum, and the only item in the contract for which he could have paid was the "education of the children"—a clause the notary had either left in by force of habit, or Jean du Barry had inserted in sheer cynicism. Mademoiselle Vaubarnier's private property is valued at thirty thousand livres—mainly in the form of diamonds, which precious stones she possessed to the value of sixteen thousand livres; her English and Valenciennes lace is valued at six thousand livres, and thirty silk robes, twenty-four corsets and other feminine gear and apparel at five thousand livres. All

this money, the contract adds, she has made by her "earnings and economies!"—a phrase that must have almost made her blush.

For some reason—perhaps, M. Vatel thinks, on account of the death of Le Bel on August 17—the marriage was deferred until September 1, when it took place at the Church of St. Laurent, at the unprecedentedly early hour of 5.0 a.m.—perhaps with a view to avoid attention, or to enable Comte Guillaume to start the same day for Toulouse.

If the contract had been a tissue of falsehoods, the marriage certificate was even worse. The bride was described as the daughter of Jean Jacques Gomard de Vaubarnier and Anne Becu, otherwise known as Quantiny, and her age given as twenty-two, thus making her out to be three years younger than she was, the legitimate child of a known father, instead of the illegitimate child of an unknown father. In order to explain the absence of Jean Jacques de Vaubarnier (whom it would have been difficult to produce in the flesh at any time) from the marriage ceremony, he was stated to have died at Vaucouleurs on September 14, 1749, in the presence of his father-in-law Fabien Becu,—who had died in 1745! The signatures of the officials to these certificates were also forged, as is conclusively proved by the fact that the attestation to the signature of the parish priest is that of a magistrate who had retired from his post some years before, and the signature of the priest is not the least like his real writing. Yet it is on this certificate that the information conveyed, even to the present day, in all English and German cyclopædias and other works of reference is founded. Jean du Barry, it should be remarked, had risked his neck

again by the forgery of these certificates, for the punishment for forging a public document was hanging, and though this severe penalty was rarely exacted, it doubtlessly would have been in this instance where the intention was to deceive the King.

Madame du Barry and her sham husband parted at the church door. He returned to Toulouse, and shortly had his solitude cheered by the opportune gift of £4000 a year, whilst she went back, for some short time at least, to her brother-in-law's house, prior to taking her departure to Compiègne or Versailles. Whilst she was still staying at Jean du Barry's house a curious incident is said to have befallen her, but there is no better authority for the story than Pidansat de Mairobert.

"An adventure," he says, "which she had with the Comte de Coigni in the winter before her presentation, was not very amusing for her. This officer had returned from Corsica, and was very anxious to renew acquaintance with the *beau sexe* of whose company he had been deprived in that island, for the women there are ugly, coarse; and disgusting,¹ and hardly had he arrived in Paris than he called upon Mademoiselle Lange, whose late history was unknown to him, and to most others for that matter. She was at first flattered by the attentions of this lord, and received him with that grace and sprightliness which were usual with her, which emboldened him to take some slight liberties. The Comtesse, whose relations with the King being still secret did not permit her to entitle herself the mistress of Louis XV, contented herself by telling the Comte that she was married.

¹ Pidansat had evidently evolved his opinion of the Corsican women from his inner consciousness.

“‘Married?’ he cried. ‘And to whom?’

“‘To Comte du Barry, whose brother you have just seen,’ she answered.

“‘You are laughing at me, my dear,’ said the Comte. ‘What does that matter—it is only one more to deceive as you have deceived so many others.’

“The Comte became more pressing, and the Comtesse becoming indignant, assumed a dignified air, and informed him that, for very important reasons, she could never see him again, but that she pardoned his impertinence on account of the *liaison* which had formerly existed between them, but which must henceforward cease for valid causes, which he would soon hear publicly. With these words she rang for the servants, and bowed him out with a dignity that astonished him.

“Having learned soon afterwards what a blunder he had committed, he wrote to the favourite a very respectful letter in which he begged her to attribute his conduct to his ignorance. It has never been remarked that she showed any animosity to him afterwards.”

The last remark gives us unintentionally an insight into the character of Pidansat and his congeners, for those literary Ishmaels lived so continually with their hand against every man and every man’s hand against them, that resentment with them was almost a second nature, and they could not understand its absence in others. Rancour and enmity were, however, foreign to the nature of Jeanne du Barry, and even in the great quarrel in which she was shortly to be involved she entered the lists unwillingly, and seemed half sorry that she triumphed eventually.

The King’s Prime Minister was at that time, and had

been for some years past, the Duc de Choiseul. More correctly speaking he was the Ministry, for he combined in his own person the functions of several Ministers and Officials, and besides having sole control of Foreign Affairs, the Army, and the Navy, was Postmaster General, Colonel and General of the Swiss Guard—a post worth a hundred thousand francs a year, and usually given to Princes of the Blood—and he also held a few minor posts. For these services he drew from the State a yearly sum which has been estimated at from seven hundred thousand to a million francs a year. He had come to regard himself not only as the most efficient man for his various posts but as being indispensable to the King. His talents do not seem to have been of a very high order, and if his own *Memoirs* are to be trusted, he was deficient in one of the first attributes of a diplomatist, and did not know how to control a sarcastic tongue. Horace Walpole says that his want of tact was astonishing, for that the Comtesse du Barry, soon after arrival at Court, having complained to the King that she was spoken of disrespectfully at the Minister's table, the Duc de Choiseul on hearing from some "damned good-natured friend" that such a complaint had been made, replied stiffly, "Madame du Barry is mistaken. We never talk of *catins* at my table." A more flagrant instance of this want of tact is related in Choiseul's *Memoirs*, for he narrates there that being offended with the Dauphin, the son of Louis XV, for having shown some document to the King, which the Minister thought ought to have passed through his hands first, he said to that Prince, "I may some day have the misfortune to be your subject, but I will never be your servant." It is but fair to state, however, that in the opinion of some of the best French historians, Choiseul's

sarcasm was the "wit of the staircase," and that these bitter remarks were not what he really *did* say, but what he thought afterwards he *might* have said, and that he reported to his friends—who of course duly repeated them—incidents which never occurred, or at least invented repartees he had never uttered. The story about Madame du Barry was most likely an invention of this kind, for it is tolerably certain that Walpole did not himself hear the Minister use the words ascribed to him, but had them second-hand from Madame du Deffand, who was the bosom friend and confidant of the Choiseuls, and with whom Walpole kept up a sort of Platonico-literary correspondence.

Choiseul, though not by any means a moral man, and willing enough to encourage Louis in vice, was by no means anxious that the King should take a fresh mistress. If she were an ambitious woman with a capacity for business, like Madame de Pompadour, she would take all the State matters into her own hands and he would become of no importance, whilst on the other side, if she were merely a light-hearted, feather-headed wanton, she would become the tool of anyone who chose to gain her interest, and to forestall them and win her over to himself would be a tacit confession of his own instability.

Besides these purely personal motives for his objection to see a fresh favourite established at Court there was another. He had a sister, the Duchesse de Gramont, to whom he was much attached—so deeply indeed that rumours were afloat that the affection was of a criminal nature, a theory so revolting that, though it obtained some credence at the depraved Court of Versailles, we prefer to ignore it here. The Duchesse was anxious, it is said,

to become the King's mistress, but had not succeeded in making any impression on Louis, who much disliked being angled for, and was but slightly impressed by her personal charms. But if she could not win the King's affection she was determined no one else should if she could help it—unless indeed it was one of her friends, Madame de Beauvau, or Madame de Boufflers—and she stirred up in her brother a still stronger feeling of opposition to the Royal mistress.

In the case of Madame du Barry this animosity was further increased by the fact that she was of low birth, and from the moment of her arrival at Court, or even before, she was made to feel the unpleasantness of her position. That she was not crushed by her powerful enemies is mainly due to the fact that the Duc de Choiseul chose the wrong weapon. It would have been very easy for him, considering the advantages his position gave him, to have proved to the King, by official documents, her humble origin, and though that would not perhaps have weakened the King's admiration for her, it would have prevented her having the position of *maîtresse en titre* and taking her place at Court. A copy of the certificate of her birth, procured from Vaucouleurs, and compared with the marriage certificate would have revealed the true nature of the latter document, and if Madame du Barry had escaped the consequences of the forgeries contained in that paper she would certainly have lost her friend and adviser Comte Jean. But, for some reason, Choiseul did not employ these very obvious means of quashing the claims of Jeanne du Barry, but preferred *spargere voces*, and employed an army of ballad-makers and hungry scribes to attack the Royal favourite in prose and verse.

A few paragraphs in the Police Journal were the precursors of the storm of abuse which was to rattle round Jeanne du Barry's head. These paragraphs did nothing more than show who was the prime mover in the opposition to Madame du Barry, for it mattered nothing to M. de Sartines who was the King's mistress, and he was far too cautious to run the risk of incurring the enmity of the new favourite. If, therefore, he opened the columns of his paper to remarks about her, or gave his official sanction to squibs, comic songs, and farces in which the favourite was none too gently treated, it was evident that he was acting under superior orders, and no particular amount of sagacity was needed to guess from whom those orders were likely to have emanated.

The most popular of all the songs written by Choiseul's orders was *La Bourbonnaise*. Grimm says there was no corner of Paris in which it was not sung, and from Paris it spread to all parts of France. The words are stupid and the exigencies of the tune require many of the lines to be repeated, which must have had the double effect of tiring the singer and boring the hearer. Another version in which the dulness was relieved by obscenity quickly followed, and other productions of the same sort soon abounded, but if they were intended to make the King disgusted with his new mistress they failed lamentably in their effect, for Louis, not satisfied with the frequent visits which his charmer made to him from Paris, ordered rooms to be prepared for her at Versailles.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTED AT COURT

AMONGST the many interesting MSS. in the Bibliothèque Nationale is one by a certain Monsieur Hardy, containing a record of the latter years of the reign of Louis XV. The diary has never been printed, and is the more valuable on that account, as when we meet in any book a statement which is also contained in Hardy, we know that the author could not have borrowed from Hardy, and if the date of publication shows that Hardy did not borrow from him, it follows that we have the authority of two independent observers for the same incident.

Hardy relates that being on the evening of February 1, 1769, at dinner with a priest, a friend of his, another priest who was present invited them to charge their glasses and drink to "the presentation." Hardy not understanding what was meant by that, asked the meaning of the phrase, and was told, "It is the presentation which took place yesterday, or will take place to-day, that of the modern Esther who is to throw down Haman, and deliver the Jews from oppression." Further enquiry on the part of Hardy elicited the information that Esther was Madame du Barry, whose presentation to the King was expected to have taken place, or to be about to take

place, and Haman was the Duc de Choiseul, whose antipathy to "the Jews," or clerical party, was well-known. But M. Hardy's enthusiastic clerical acquaintance was a trifle hasty in his conjectures; for reasons which will presently be explained, the presentation of Madame du Barry to the King did not take place till April 22.

Madame du Barry had definitively taken up her quarters at Versailles in December 1768, or January 1769. Mairobert quotes from a Gazette under date of December 12, 1768, "It is looked upon as a settled thing that Madame la Comtesse Dubarry will not be presented. The pretty face of this young bride has attracted the attention of all the courtiers, and the King appeared to wish to increase the number of the beauties of his Court. Some bad reports, however, reached Mesdames (the daughters of Louis XV) as to the origin and the early years of this new Comtesse, which compelled them to beg the King not to allow her to appear before them. H.M. was obliged to give way to these representations, but has sought how to compensate Madame du Barry for this mortification by all sorts of benefits and kindnesses. She lives at Versailles in the apartment of Sieur Le Bel, the chief *valet de chambre* (who introduced her to the King). This ineffectual attempt (to get introduced) has caused a good deal of rumour at the Court, and it is believed that the jealousy of some ladies, who had designs themselves, and who feared with reason they would be eclipsed by the charming debutante, have contributed in no small degree to the general indignation against her. The Ministers even have taken sides in this affair which has assumed a great importance for them."

To anyone accustomed to read between the lines it is

evident that Choiseul prompted this article but that the person who wrote it perceived a divided duty, and made a praiseworthy endeavour to "sit on the fence," and not commit himself until he saw which side was going to win.

We learn, however, from this paragraph that Madame du Barry was established at Versailles early in December 1768, and had apparently been there sufficiently long for the question of her presentation to the King to be raised, discussed, and—Choiseul and his scribes would have us believe—finally abandoned. The Gazette just quoted states that she inhabited the rooms of Le Bel (to whom the writer alludes as if he were still alive), but if so that could only have been a temporary arrangement. In January 1769, Madame du Barry had a suite of apartments given her, and was no longer obliged to inhabit the rooms of a deceased valet. The new apartment was that of the Princess Adelaide, one of the King's daughters, who removed to the rooms left vacant by the death of the Dauphiness.

As soon as she was regularly installed, the question of her presentation to the King was raised—or revived, if we believe the Gazette. The ceremony was one which was almost vital to a courtier. It was the passport to the more exalted realms of Flunkeydom. It conferred every privilege for which the unrepresented were thought likely to yearn, but which many millions contrived to do without very well. A person who had not been presented, might not be admitted to the Royal suppers, nor follow the King's carriage in any of his migrations from one palace to another, and, most particularly, might not reside in the palace.

Comte Jean du Barry was, of course, extremely anxious that his sister-in-law should be presented, and so also

were old Richelieu and de Maupeou, but the person who was most desirous that the ceremony should take place was the King himself. But even he felt that there were serious difficulties to be overcome, unless all the rules of etiquette were to be laid aside. The person presented had to furnish proofs of good descent, and Jeanne du Barry did not know who her father was, and her mother's family was not of the best. The King is reported to have proposed to obviate this difficulty by buying for his mistress, for the sum of seven hundred thousand livres, the principality of Lus en Bigarre, and letting her pass herself off as a foreign princess, in which case she would not have to produce any proofs. We know that this plan was never carried out and that Madame du Barry was not presented as a foreign princess, but how the difficulty concerning "the proofs" was overcome we have no means of ascertaining. No such proofs have ever been found, but whether the King did without them, or whether they were furnished and afterwards abstracted from the "King's cabinet" cannot be said.

But if the King was desirous of seeing his mistress have a recognized position at Court, there was a strong party led by Choiseul opposed to her. The Minister contrived to win over to his side the daughters of Louis, persuading them that their father ought not to take a mistress so soon after the death of their mother, who had been dead rather more than six months. The opposition of the Princesses meant little more than a timid protest to the King, and a snub to the mistress when she was presented to them, but the Minister, foreseeing that Jeanne du Barry—whose influence over the King became stronger every day—would be a formidable weapon in the hands of his enemies, was resolutely opposed to the presentation,

talked of resigning if it took place, and perhaps would have done so if he had not been deeply in debt in spite of his enormous salary. He was inexorable, although the King wrote to him, "She is very pretty—I am satisfied—that ought to suffice."

Choiseul writes in his *Memoirs*, "I certainly believe, even with the bad opinion I have of the King, that he would never have dared to carry out such an indecent proceeding, if he had not been encouraged by the Maréchal de Richelieu, who, unfortunately for the Court and France, was first gentleman-in-waiting that year." The Minister's methods of preventing this indecent proceeding were not too decent themselves. He looked about for some one who should supplant Madame du Barry in the King's graces, and hit upon a Madame Millin, the wife of a Paris doctor, a young and pretty woman who was devoted to Choiseul, and willing enough to become the King's mistress if she had the chance.

This attempt to supplant the Du Barry failed lamentably, and it seems strange that the Duc de Choiseul should have lent himself to such an "indecent proceeding," but it appears conclusively proved that he did. Hardy who wrote in Paris, and whose Diary never left his possession, makes mention of the incident, and his account is confirmed by De Belleval, who was then stationed at Versailles¹ and who adds that he has seen the young woman, who though very pretty is not to be compared to the favourite. The name of Millin de la Courvaut, "professor of medical matters," is also to be found in the Almanach Royal for the year 1769.

The lampoons, songs, etc., about Madame du Barry

¹ *Souvenirs d'un cheval-léger*, p. 118.

increased in number and intensity. Plays were made about her and acted at the booths at the fairs round Paris, and at least one novelette was written on her life. It is entitled *Vie de la Bourbonnaise*, by MM. Henerlinque, clerk in the Post Office, and Alexandre, musician, and is a highly moral little book—where it is not startlingly obscene. It ends with the stale aphorism “displayed” in all the dignity of “small caps,” that “Virtue in want is preferable to Opulence in Vice.” This little book is extremely rare, and there is no copy of it in the Bibliothèque Nationale, but there is a copy in the Arsenal Library, and a comparison of this little story (which professes to be fiction) with the *Anecdotes* of Pidansat de Mairobert (which pretend to be fact) will show many curious points of resemblance between the two which cannot be the result of accident, and which afford an additional proof of the value which is to be attached to that veracious history.

This abuse was too coarse to show the Princesses, whom Choiseul wished to make his allies, and he therefore—according to the *Anecdotes*—obtained from one of his literary men some verses which were more “ingenious and delicate, and consequently more cruel and treacherous.” The satire may have been ingenious, but it was so very delicate that Madame du Barry may have been excused for missing the irony contained in the verses, and accepting them as complimentary. The first verse runs:

“Lisette ta beauté séduisit
Et charme tout le monde
En vain la Duchesse en rougit
Et la Princesse en gronde
Chacun sait que Vénus naquit
De l’écume de l’onde.”

Which may be roughly translated as:

"Lisette, you adorn
The world where you reign.
Though the Duchess show scorn,
And the Princess complain,
We know Venus was born
Of the foam of the main."

The verses have been attributed to the Duc de Nivernois and to the Chevalier de Boufflers, but according to M. de Paulmy, whose evidence is likely to be the best, they are by the Abbé de Lattaignan, Canon of Rheims. It appears to have been felt that the verses were too much like Balaam's curse, and another partisan of Choiseul—most probably the Chevalier de Lisle—followed them with a biting epigram on the modern Venus:

"Two Venuses men say there be
And to govern the world is their lot.
One was born of the foam of the sea,
And one of the scum of the pot."

In spite of all these sarcasms Madame du Barry's presentation to the Court would have taken place as early as January, 1769, but for a difficulty in finding a "sponsor" for her. By Court etiquette she was to be introduced by a lady who had herself the *entrée* at Court, but no one appeared willing to undertake the task. The Baronne de Montmorency was willing to do it for a consideration, but perhaps the sum she asked was excessive, for the negotiations fell through, and another lady came forward, but finding that the Princesses turned their backs upon her the next time she went to Court, she begged to be ex-

cused from acting as *marraine*. Jean du Barry at last found a Comtesse du Béarn, a lady of very good family, but poor, who was willing to act as sponsor. The ceremony was, however, again postponed on account of an accident to the King whilst hunting. He fell from his horse on his right arm, which soon swelled to such an extent that on his arrival at the palace (where he was carried on a mattress laid on two ladders), it was found requisite to cut away the sleeve of his coat. There was a slight dislocation of the shoulder. The accident was rather a severe one, considering the age of the King, though the Duc de Choiseul in his *Memoirs* makes out it was a mere trifle, and that Louis behaved "with a weakness that would have been ridiculous in a girl of ten years old." Further delays were caused by the Comtesse de Béarn, who "jibbed" at the last moment, and pleaded a sprained ankle, and also by the preparations for the marriage of the Duc de Chartres.

At last the ceremony really came off on Saturday, April 22. Madame du Barry appears to have acquitted herself well. One report states that "she was very well received by Mesdames—even with marked kindness; all the spectators admired the dignity of her bearing and the ease of her attitudes. The part of a Court lady is not easy to play the first time, but Madame du Barry acted as though she had been long used to it." Ladies used to take lessons from Vestris, the celebrated dancer, that they might learn how to bow gracefully, and might acquire the "circular kick" needed to get the long train out of the way of the *debutante's* feet as she retired backwards. Perhaps the frequent delays which had taken place had enabled Madame du Barry to master these difficulties thoroughly. Even

Madame de Genlis, who was not likely to speak favourably of the King's mistress (being, one may suspect, one of the unsuccessful competitors for the post) can find no fault with the manner in which Madame du Barry came through the ordeal, though she is careful to tell us that her face looked *passée*, her complexion was spoiled by freckles, and that her behaviour showed "revolting effrontery." Madame de Genlis is obliged to concede, however, that the new favourite had fair hair of a charming colour, pretty teeth, and a pleasant face, and was dressed, on this occasion, magnificently and in good taste.

On the following day (Sunday) she was present at Mass in the Chapel Royal, was again splendidly dressed, and covered with diamonds, and occupied the seat of the late Marquise de Pompadour. The diamonds are accounted for by the fact that the evening before the presentation a jeweller, by the King's command, brought from Paris diamonds to the amount of a hundred thousand francs for Madame du Barry.

Jeanne Becu has now attained the slippery eminence of the King's favour. She is now a "queen of the left hand," the last France has ever known, and most probably ever will know. We have now to watch her in her short-lived prosperity till, in five years time, her hopes are suddenly shattered like Alnaschar's basket of glass. Then a long period of retirement, which was perhaps a heavy punishment to one who had enjoyed the power and affluence of the King's favour, or perhaps was a welcome rest and relief from all the chicanery, intrigues, plots and counterplots, jealousies, meannesses, and hatreds of Court life. Then trials, losses, the accusation brought by a base ungrateful wretch she had reared for her own destruction,

and then the condemnation—the passionate appeals for that mercy she had often obtained for others and now begged for herself in vain—and then the remorseless guillotine-knife shears from its shoulders the fair head that the last great King of France had loved so well.

CHAPTER IV

ERRANDS OF MERCY

THOUGH Louis XV was said "to do nothing" on the days on which he did not hunt, he had to make a pretence of being busy, and find employment for the numerous officials who constituted his extensive household. To do this, or possibly to get rid for a time of the chronic *ennui* which oppressed him, he visited in turn all the royal residences round Paris, namely Choisy, Compiègne, Saint Hubert, and Fontainebleau. Soon after the presentation there had been a short stay at Marly, but the visit had not been successful, for the ladies were jealous of the new mistress, and the gentlemen also begged to be excused from attendance, the consequence being that there were not enough courtiers to fill the gambling tables, and the stakes were so small that no one was ruined—a state of things which had never been previously known at Marly.

At Choisy the entertainments were usually theatrical. No performances had taken place since 1765, on account of the death of the Dauphin in that year, but they were resumed in 1769. A great number of ladies came to Choisy on this occasion, some of them being already won over by the "sweetness of manner and modesty" of Madame du Barry. This was not invariably the case, however, for

the Princesse de Guémené started up with the exclamation of "Fi, l'horreur," when the favourite sat next to her. Indirectly this was a reflection on the King, who requested the Princesse to retire into the country and stay there. The "virtuous daughters" of Louis XV had also "heroically refused their hands" to the new mistress, but as she, according to the same authority,¹ "was of such limited intellect that she did not notice it," the "heroism" was rather wasted. "The presence of this new divinity" also prevented these same virtuous Princesses from coming to Choisy this year, but as—except for the last four—Louis had never been without a mistress during some thirty years, the Princesses must have been debarred from participation in many of the changes of residence of their august father.

Pidansat de Mairobert implies, in his usual untruthful manner, that advantage was taken of this absence of the Princesses, and that the pieces acted before the King—which of course were selected by Madame du Barry—were of the most indecent kind. On investigation this, like most other statements of Pidansat's, turns out to be utterly incorrect. The pieces performed were by Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Crebillon, Molière, etc., and the only new play produced was a comedy (with music) entitled *Alix and Alexis*, which was rather more proper than the morals of the time would have led one to expect, and not in the least calculated to lighten the *ennui* of Louis XV.

But if Madame du Barry did not have the selection of the plays performed before the King, she was shortly called upon to play a part herself and acquitted herself so well

¹ *Précis historique de la vie de Madame du Barry.*

that she repeated the performance with success on two or three other occasions. The part was that of an interceder for those who were punished unjustly or too severely, and she always prevailed upon the King to show clemency. This was by no means a usual habit with him. Like all intensely selfish people, he was very hard-hearted, or as he said of himself, he "wept very little," but on the other hand he liked to be important or to be thought important, and would have pardoned almost any offender for whom a pretty woman had pleaded sufficiently hard.

Unfortunately for the victims of the severely repressive laws of those days, they had never found an advocate with the King; Maria Leeczinska had no influence with Louis, and at the best of times would have pleaded but coldly. Madame de Mailly was supersensitive, and avoided interference in business of any sort, lest it should be thought she acted from interested motives; Madame de Vintimille was too thoughtless, and Châteauroux too proud, ever to trouble about a few criminals; and Madame de Pompadour put many people in prison, but never let anyone out, though frequent appeals were made to her, and though she could have acted without the King,—as indeed she did in more important matters.

Madame du Barry was of a very different nature. She was a daughter of the people, had seen poverty and suffering, and her heart was naturally tender. She had only been established a few weeks as *maîtresse en titre*, when an opportunity occurred for testing her influence, and she succeeded in saving the life of a poor girl, and without invoking the King's aid.

The following is the account of the incident as related in the *Anecdotes*.

A young girl, belonging to a place called Léancourt, was seduced by the curé of the parish (who died soon afterwards) and became pregnant. Either through shame, or out of regard for the memory of her pastor, she omitted to make the declaration required by the *Ordonnances*, and after an illness, occasioned no doubt by grief and mental distress, she was delivered of a still-born child. This came to the ears of the authorities, and as she had not complied with the law, she was charged with infanticide and sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was confirmed by the Parliament, and the prisoner sent back to her native place to be executed.

One of the Black Musketeers, a M. de Mondeville, chanced to hear the story at a country-house where he was staying. He was touched with compassion for the poor girl, and having drawn up a statement of the case which was signed by the other guests, he rode off at once to Marly, and although he knew nothing of Madame du Barry, he went straight to her and related the tale. She not only received him affably but wrote at once the following letter to the Chancellor—a letter which gives an emphatic denial to the supposition that she was incapable of anything of the kind, and which proves how great is the simple eloquence of the heart.

“Monsieur le Chancelier,

“I know nothing of your laws, but they are unjust and barbarous, and contrary to policy, reason and humanity, if they kill a poor girl for having been delivered of a still-born child without having declared it. According to the enclosed petition the suppliant is in this position; it appears that she is only condemned for being ignorant of

the law, or not having, through a very natural modesty, conformed to it. I leave the examination of this affair to your sense of justice, but this unfortunate being deserves some indulgence. I ask therefore for a mitigation of the punishment. Your own good feeling will suggest to you the rest.

"I have the honour to be, &c., &c."

M. de Mondeville took this letter to the Chancellor who ordered a respite until he had examined the case, and then pardoned the girl. All Paris applauded this good action which was equally honourable for the Musketeer, the Countess, and the Chancellor.¹

Pidansat de Mairobert has rather exaggerated the story, and has added some picturesque details, and suppressed others. M. Vatel, whose patience is invaluable in a search of this sort, discovered, from an old register at the Conciergerie, which luckily escaped destruction in 1871, that the girl's name was Appoline Grégeois, and that she was condemned for having concealed her pregnancy, and also for having stolen coiffures and linen, from Louis Leroux, a baker at Gisors, and sixty-six francs from the curé of St. Martin's at Chaumont. The indictment and the decree of the Parliament of Paris record these particulars, and the register of pardons shows that on June 20 the *Procureur Général* ordered a respite, and that on June 28 the sentence was commuted to three years' imprisonment.

The seduction by the curé, his death, and the illness of the girl are inventions of Mairobert's or derived from some authority not now accessible, and he adroitly passes

¹ *Anecdotes*, p. 107.

over the thefts. It is not easy to determine whether "the supposition that Madame du Barry was incapable of anything of the kind," applies to the letter or to the action. Certainly Madame du Barry would have found a difficulty in expressing herself so tersely and forcibly, and however good her heart was, it would not have furnished her with such neat expressions of indignation.

This affair appears to have been adjusted without the intervention of the King, or if his signature was obtained, it was as a matter of form, but the next case in which Madame du Barry's intercession was employed was a very serious one, for it was no less than armed opposition to the officers of the law, which in those days was construed into rebellion, or treason, against the King.

In Champagne, between Montargis and Joigny, there stood an old château, named Parc Vieil, the residence of the Comte and Comtesse de Loüesme. For some generations back the family had been in decadence and the Count, who had succeeded his father in 1766 found himself hopelessly involved in debt. Law-proceedings followed, and finally a creditor named Dorcy charged two huissiers to put in an execution. Resistance appears to have been anticipated, for the bailiffs took with them two detachments of gendarmes, and they surrounded the château at 3.0 a.m. (or 4.0 a.m., for accounts differ, and the point is an important one) on the morning of July 1, 1768.

Like most old châteaux Parc Vieil was surrounded by a moat. The drawbridge had long since broken down, and the moat was crossed by means of beams of wood which the garrison pulled up every night. The huissiers and their troops summoned the Comte and his household

to surrender, and then, having managed to cross the moat, commenced to break down the doors. The Comte and Comtesse fired at the assailants, and the engagement became general. At last the representatives of the law were beaten off, and retreated, leaving two of their number dead on the field—Jolivet, one of the *huissiers*, and a soldier of the *maréchaussée*.

After this exploit the Comte and Comtesse de Loüesme made no attempt to fly, but strengthened their defences, placed sentinels, and awaited events. In two days quite an army appeared under the walls of the château. It consisted of the *maréchaussée*, or gendarmes of all the neighbouring towns, and a goodly sprinkling of peasants who had been called upon to support the authorities. The siege began, but one of the first shots fired by the besiegers killed Godard, the family coachman, an old retainer of the De Loüesme family, and the garrison thereupon surrendered. All the inhabitants of the château—nine in number—were taken prisoners, and marched off to Montargis.

Incidents of this kind had been common enough during the preceding reign, and were not unknown in the time of Louis XV. In 1775 the Marquis de Pleumartin killed with a pistol shot the commandant of a detachment of the *maréchaussée* under similar circumstances. He was condemned to be beheaded, but to spare his family the ignominy of a public execution he was strangled in the prison. By order of the King, the Comte and Comtesse de Loüesme were brought to Paris to be tried by the Parliament, their offence being rebellion against the King's authority. Perhaps the Parliament had more important business in hand, but a whole year elapsed ere the De Loüesmes were brought to trial.

Counsel had not much scope in the defence of their clients in those days, and M. d'Aligrand, who appeared for the Comte, could raise no better plea than that the attack was irregular and illegal, the sun not having risen. The trial lasted the greater part of one day, and the Comte and Comtesse were condemned to be beheaded. The widow and children of Jolivet, the dead *huissier*, were also to receive compensation.

Execution swiftly followed condemnation in those days, and it was no unusual thing for a man to be sentenced in the morning and executed at noon.¹ This was supposed to be done to spare the condemned the additional torture of a long delay, but it had the corresponding disadvantage that if any error was committed, it could not be set right till the Day of Judgment. Thus for instance, on November 1, 1746, the *Procureur général* sent a "placet" ordering the release of one Guillaume Cor, but received the reply that Guillaume Cor had already been released—by means of the gallows—from a world in which judicial errors were too frequent.

No time was therefore to be lost in appealing, and it was common for the relatives of the accused to beseech the King's mercy before the sentence was uttered. The Comtesse de Moyon, the daughter of the De Loüesmes, fell at the King's feet and besought the lives of her parents, but Louis remained inflexible, and replied that the law must take its course. Chancellor Maupeou, though related to the condemned, declared that their offence was one which the King could not overlook, and refused to hear any

¹ The French have now gone to the other extreme, and several months often elapse between the date of the sentence and that of the execution.

arguments in their behalf. The day was wearing to a close and the Comte and Comtesse were to be executed at daybreak the next morning. Madame de Moyon was acquainted with the Comtesse de Béarn, the old lady who had acted as "sponsor" to Madame du Barry on her presentation. The Comtesse de Béarn was begged to ask Madame du Barry to intercede with the King, and in a few minutes the favourite was made acquainted with the details of the case. She went at once to the King, threw herself on her knees at his feet, and declared that she would not rise until the King granted her request. The tears and supplications of a daughter had had no effect on Louis, but he was not proof against the appealing look on the Madonna like¹ face of his beautiful mistress, and raising her from the ground, he cried,

"Madame, I am delighted that the first favour you obtain from me should be an act of mercy."

All that was gained from the King was a respite, but a fresh intercession by Madame du Barry led to the sentence being commuted to imprisonment for life, and the Comte and Comtesse de Lotiesme were confined in the castle of Saumur "at the expense of their relatives." Nine years later they were released from prison, but banished from France. Their property was sold for sixty-two thousand five hundred francs, (September, 1778) and Louis XVI, who was then on the Throne, was kind enough, or weak enough, to allow them a small pension for the remainder of their lives.

The important share which Madame du Barry had in this transaction won for her golden opinions from all

¹ "To the pure and modest beauty of a Madonna, Du Barry united the language and manners of a common courtesan." JULIA KAVAN-
AGH: *Woman in France in the 18th Century*.

sorts of people, and many of the great ladies of the Court; who had hitherto regarded her with hatred or aversion, became more kindly disposed towards her; though perhaps it would not be cynical to imagine that they were less attracted by her kindness and compassion than by the undoubted proof she had given of her complete dominion over the weak and doting old King. Even Pidansat says that "No one—unless he had personal motives for hatred—could fail to like her, she was so honest, affable, and gentle. She had the virtue—especially rare in her sex—of never speaking ill of anyone, and never uttered complaints or reproaches, which a very natural feeling of revenge might suggest, against those who envied her, and those who had not only published abroad the not very creditable stories of her life, but had embroidered them with basenesses and enormities."

As Pidansat de Mairobert had no personal motive for hating Madame du Barry, he seems to have dissembled his love very thoroughly, and not to have greatly troubled himself to strive after that virtue of never speaking ill of persons, which his superiority of sex should have enabled him to acquire so easily. As for the last lines, it would be difficult to believe they ever proceeded from his pen, if a Great Master had not already shown us in "Barry Lyndon" that a man may become so steeped in his own weakness and vices, that he not only becomes oblivious of their real nature but eventually regards them as virtues.

Perhaps, however, Pidansat only wished to show Madame du Barry that he sold honey as well as vinegar, and that he could—for a consideration—extol her virtues quite as easily as he could string together "the not too creditable anecdotes" of her life.

CHAPTER V

A SHAM FIGHT AND A REAL QUARREL

ABOUT the middle of July the Court moved to Compiègne, that residence being generally next in order to be visited, and whilst there the King presented the Château of Louveciennes to Madame du Barry (July 24, 1769). This estate originally belonged to the Marquis de Beringhen, but Louis XIV cast a longing eye on it, and in the year 1700 proposed to buy it, or rather to exchange it against an estate he had at Chatellerie-de-Tournan, in Brie. The Marquis de Beringhen accepted, "with the respect and submission due to the King's orders," and the two estates having been appraised and found to be nearly equal in value, the transaction was concluded, and Louveciennes became an appanage of the Crown.

There does not seem to have been any house on the estate at the time, and the first thing that Louis XIV did was to erect a large hydraulic pump intended to supply the Château of Versailles with water from the Seine, and build a small house for the resident engineer, who was to look after the machine. The engineer—a Baron Arnold Deville—retired a few years later, and presumably the working of the machine was understood by that time, for no successor was appointed, but the house was

enlarged, and presented, for life, to Mademoiselle de Clermont. On her death, in 1741, the Queen, Maria Leeczinska, asked for it, but the King replied with his usual selfishness, that he intended to use it himself whenever he visited Marly, "because he found the *petits cabinets* at Marly too small and too stuffy," but he afterwards gave Louveciennes to the Comtesse de Toulouse, though she had not asked for it.

The Comtesse de Toulouse was a great favourite with Louis XV, and had been useful in his amours with Madame de Mailly, Madame de Vintimille, and Madame de Châteauroux. Possibly Louis wished to avail himself of her services, on some future occasion, and determined therefore to have her near him. On the death of the Comtesse de Toulouse, September 30, 1766, the estate passed to her only son, the Duc de Penthièvre, for his lifetime. His son, the Prince de Lamballe, was married four months later, January 31, 1767, to Maria Theresa Louisa, of Savoy, Princesse de Carignan, the beautiful and unfortunate lady, the friend of Marie Antoinette, who met with such a tragic fate in the Revolution. A year after his marriage the Prince de Lamballe, then hardly twenty-two years old, died—"a victim of debauchery," the contemporary journals and pamphlets say, but it is not unlikely he died of some hereditary disease, as all his five brothers and sisters died at about the same age.

After his death the Duc de Penthièvre, taking a dislike to a house connected with associations that were so sad for him, gave back the property to the King.¹ Louve-

¹ In the *Memoirs* of the Princess de Lamballe (which were really written by "Favrolle," otherwise Madame Guémard) it is stated that he *sold* the property, but this, of course, is incorrect as he never had more than a life interest.

ciennes had been empty about two years at the time when Louis presented it as a token of friendliness or good-will to Madame du Barry, for the "term of her natural life," for, being State property, it was not in his power to dispose of it absolutely.

A want of the knowledge of this fact has caused a great number of erroneous statements about the cost of Louveciennes, and Louis was accused of spending large sums of the public money on his mistress, the sums apparently increasing in geometrical progression. Pidansat de Mai-robert started by guessing a million francs. Dulaure, who includes the expenses of Madame du Barry during her stay there, makes an estimate of six millions, Prud'homme outbids him and says ten millions, and some writers of the present day talk about many times that amount. As a matter of fact the total amount expended in repairing the house, adding accommodation for the household, baths, etc., laying out the garden, making an orangery, etc., amounted to only £ 6531, and that was not an "extra" but was paid out of Madame du Barry's civil list. She afterwards expended large sums in improving the property, and it was doubtless then that the highly coloured reports about the amounts wasted arose. After all the money lavished so freely the Château was not a comfortable residence. It was not commodious enough for the King and his numerous suite, and the unceasing clang of the pump, just below the house, must have been far from pleasant. Madame Le Brun records that when she stayed at Louveciennes the "lamentable noise" annoyed her greatly.

Before this month (July) finished there were signs of the great struggle that was to ensue later on between

the Minister and the Mistress, and which was to end—in the words of Carlyle—with “dismissal of his last substantial man, but pacification of his scarlet-woman.” Into the nature of that quarrel, and what share Madame du Barry had in it, it will be our task to examine later on; in the present instance at least the Duc de Choiseul had right and decency on his side.

A “pleasure camp” had been established at Verberie, near Compiègne, in order to give the Dauphin and his brothers some initiation into military affairs. The troops consisted of forty-two battalions of infantry, a regiment of cavalry and an artillery corps with forty guns, all under the command of Baron de Wurmser, Lieutenant General, and Chief Inspector of the German Infantry. The manœuvres extended over three days, and were witnessed by the King, his three grand-children, Mesdames de France (the three daughters of Louis XV) and—Madame du Barry. General Dumouriez has recorded in his *Memoirs* that at the review which terminated these manœuvres he saw “with sorrow the old King of France, on foot, with doffed hat, in sight of his army at the side of a magnificent phaeton, doing homage to the—Du Barry.”

The Duc de Choiseul was dissatisfied and vexed at the growing popularity of Madame du Barry, and seems to have vented his anger on some of the officers with reference to their behaviour towards the King’s mistress. The King who was jealous of any attempt to interfere with his power, and felt that these animadversions touched him indirectly, wrote to the Minister as follows,

“As I have promised to tell you all that occurs to me concerning you, I now acquit myself of that task. It is

said that you scolded Wurmser, I do not know about what, but that you let slip a good round f—. ¹

"It is said that you reprimanded the Chevalier de la Tour du Pin because Madame du Barry dined in the camp, and a great number of the officers dined at her house the day of the review.

"You also reprimanded M. Foulon for some cause.

"You promised me that I should not hear any more from you about her.

"I speak to you in confidence and friendship. You may be inveighed against in public—that is always the fate of Ministers, especially when they oppose the friends of the Master—but for all that the Master is very satisfied with their work, and with yours in particular."

From the expression "You promised me that I should not hear any more from you about her," it is evident that Louis had already complained about the attacks made on his mistress, and that Choiseul had promised that the songs, lampoons, etc., should cease.

The reply of the Duc de Choiseul is long and apologetic. He begins by stating that His Majesty must know "in the bottom of his soul" that he (Choiseul) is the object of all the malignity and hatred of those who *surround* Madame du Barry. The King will know how much credit to give to persons who are "seventy years old and even more." As for the young ones they are merely pitiable, and "think they are doing something wonderful in censuring and braving your Minister." Descending to the

¹ Initial letter of a common and coarse expression which the King thought "unfit for publication," but which he must often have heard from old Richelieu, and—if the story be true—on one celebrated occasion from Madame du Barry.

particular charges, the Duc denies having rated Wurmser or used improper language, and adds "he is here and can speak the truth." As for what happened in connection with the regiment De Beauce, there is no truth in it, though there is more appearance of truth. He did not reprimand the Chevalier de la Tour du Pin, and never spoke to him about either giving or accepting a dinner, "I am, Sire," he says, "a thousand leagues above such petty trifles. The day that Your Majesty witnessed the manoeuvres of the forty-two battalions, I was told that the Beauce Regiment had saluted and given the same honours to Madame du Barry as to you;—I did not say a word to my informant. In the evening at my house the same thing was repeated, but I appeared to pay no attention. The following day I told M. de Rochambeau that it had been reported to me that the Beauce Regiment had saluted other carriages besides those of the Royal Family whilst Your Majesty was in front of the line; that that was not right, and I charged him to inform M. de la Tour du Pin that he should not render salutes to anyone else when the King was in camp." The Minister then points out that De la Tour du Pin has been promoted, and his regiment has had granted all the requests made (leaves of absence, etc., we may conclude), which proves there was no ill-humour on his (the Duc's) part.

The unfortunate M. Foulon—he who said, or was reported to have said, that if the people had no bread they might eat grass, and who, years hence, was to be the first victim of the Lanterne—is treated none too well in Choiseul's letter, for the Minister says about him, "As for Foulon I do not remember to have *scolded* him. I distrust him because I never believed him to be honest.

He is what is called an intriguer with unbounded ambition, but is very far from having the capacity needful for the places to which he aspires. I never spoke but once to him of Madame du Barry, and that was three weeks ago, concerning a man, named Nallet, whom Madame du Barry had recommended to me. Since I have been at Compiègne I have only seen Foulon twice, and then in public, and did not speak to him, and if he says that under any circumstances whatever, since I have known him, I have reprimanded him concerning Madame du Barry—M. Foulon is an impudent liar."

In spite of the apologetic tone of the letter, there runs through it a half-disdainful tone in those passages which concern Madame du Barry, and this is more evident when it is known that Foulon aspired to be Superintendent of Finance and had made overtures to the King's mistress to aid him in procuring the post. The reasons for the enmity of the Duc de Choiseul have already been glanced at, and if war had not been openly declared it was because it takes two parties to make a quarrel, and Madame du Barry was deterred from taking any action, partly by her own good-nature, and partly by the counsels of her chief friend and adviser.

Comte Jean du Barry, though (for reasons which are sufficiently obvious) he could not appear at Court, was far too astute to lose his influence over his fair sister-in-law. He had unlimited faith in her powers of fascination, but not much belief in her capacity for business. She, on the other hand, recognized that it was entirely due to his schemes that she had attained her position, and presumably had a high opinion of his talents, and he had no difficulty in persuading her that his experience and cunning

would be of great use to her in the difficult game she had to play. Though the King never came to Paris, all the royal residences were within a few miles of the capital, though in different directions, and it was easy for Jean du Barry from his central position to be in constant communication with his ex-mistress. To facilitate this arrangement he placed with her, as companion, his sister Mademoiselle du Barry, who is said, in the *Anecdotes*, to have been ugly and deformed, but almost, if not quite, as clever as her brother, and therefore eminently fitted to look after the family interests, and protect the King's favourite from the machinations of her enemies, and her good nature from being imposed upon by friends.

Jean du Barry was kept well informed of the proceedings of the Duc de Choiseul, and, though he knew that a struggle was almost inevitable, he first tried every means to preserve peace, for he saw what profit to himself there would be if the Minister and the Mistress could be brought to work together. An example of how he strove to attain this is given in the *Memoirs* of Lauzun.

"During the stay at Compiègne M. du Barry made an appointment with me to meet him in the forest, and I awaited him there the following morning. He complained to me of the bitterness that the Duc de Choiseul showed to Madame du Barry and to him, said that she was willing to do justice to such a great minister, and ardently desired to live on good terms with him, and hoped that he would not force her to become his enemy; that she had more influence with the King than Madame de Pompadour had ever had, and that she would be very vexed if he obliged her to use it to his harm. He desired me to relate this conversation to the Duc de Choiseul, and

to make to him all sorts of protestations of attachment.

"I executed the commission.

"The Duc de Choiseul received it with all the haughtiness of a Minister who is harassed by women, but who believes he has nothing to fear. He declared that there was war to the knife between him and the King's mistress, and Madame de Gramont made some very insulting remarks, in which she did not spare even the King."

De Lauzun was the nephew of the Duc de Choiseul, his mother being the sister of the Duc's wife. He was in a singular position with regard to the two ladies concerned, for he had met Mademoiselle Vaubarnier, prior to her introduction to the King, and if he had not been her lover, it was not because Jean du Barry had not afforded him the opportunity; and he relates also that when he was "a good-looking lad of fourteen, the Duchesse de Gramont took a great liking to me, with the intention, I believe, of quietly making me a little lover she could have all to herself without any inconvenience." Possibly the recollection of this, coupled with the fact that he was now appearing as an ambassador from Madame du Barry, did not tend to conciliate the proud and hot-tempered Duchesse. At any rate the embassy failed, and Choiseul—perhaps to prove his contempt for the King's mistress and her friends, and his belief in the impregnability of his position—soon afterwards started on a long journey to Metz, Nancy, Chanteloup, and Deux Ponts, leaving his enemies a clear field.

If the military manœuvres at Compiègne aggravated the long standing animosity the Minister bore to the Mistress, they also procured for Madame du Barry a fresh enemy. Dumouriez, the young soldier who was so shocked to see

the King of France standing bareheaded by the side of the carriage of the Du Barry, had, like De Lauzun, known Mademoiselle Vaubarnier in the old days, and had met her at the house of one of her *demi-mondaine* friends. He states in his *Journal* that, "the Du Barry knowing that I was in the camp and had not come to worship her, as all the other Frenchmen did, reproached me, and although not very vindictive, afterwards willingly helped to put me in the Bastille." Surely it would have been very reasonable on the part of Madame du Barry not to wish to see any of the persons she had known in former times, but at any rate she had no more to do with putting Dumouriez in the Bastille than she had with the transit of Venus which she had beheld a few nights previously. Louis XV, as has been previously stated, to give himself a fictitious importance in the eyes of European potentates, was accustomed to send secret agents to the various Courts with orders to follow a policy usually diametrically opposed to that laid down for the accredited Ambassador from France. It not unfrequently happened therefore that these secret agents were regarded by the Ambassadors—who of course did not know their position—as spies, or traitors, or at the best as adventurers, and in the reports to the Foreign Minister no doubt the Ambassadors often stated that their task had been rendered more difficult by the unaccountable actions of Comte This, or Chevalier That—naming the King's secret agent. As a natural result, the King's agent no sooner returned to France than the Minister pounced upon him and sent him to prison, and as Louis had not the courage to defend his emissaries and an explanation would have destroyed the elaborately idiotic scheme of his private correspondence, the unfortunate

agent remained in prison till it was worth somebody's while to let him out again.

This was precisely what had happened in the case of Dumouriez. He was one of the King's secret agents, and had been raising troops at Hamburg to assist Gustavus III of Sweden, who had just made a *coup d'état*, and was threatened with civil war in consequence. Dumouriez and two others, named Ségur and Favier, were arrested on a charge of treason. Full particulars of the affair will be found in Boutaric's *Correspondance secrète de Louis XV*, but there is not, from first to last, any mention of Madame du Barry's name.

To imagine that he was locked up because he refused to worship the Du Barry evinces a fatuous self-conceit on the part of Dumouriez if he was not aware of the real cause of his incarceration, or something much worse if he *was* aware of it. There were in Paris, and at Versailles, many men who refused to bow the knee to the new goddess, and who wrote scurrilous songs about her as well, but she did not put any of those men in prison, though she had a double motive for doing so. It should be remarked too that Dumouriez was not arrested till long after the Compiègne review, and was not released until August 2, 1774, or nearly four months after the death of the King and the downfall of the Favourite. If any persons had been imprisoned by her orders they would have been set at liberty the day she lost her power.

CHAPTER VI

A PORTRAIT DRAWN BY A SOLDIER'S HAND

FROM Compiègne the Court moved to Fontainebleau. A sort of tradition or superstition existed among the courtiers, and those of the public who were interested in Court doings, that this particular change of residence was always followed by extraordinary political events. This occasion formed no exception to the rule, for on September 24 the Duc M. Chaulnes, Captain-Lieutenant of the Light Cavalry of the Household Troops, died. The post he held was not only a lucrative but an important one, as its possessor had frequent opportunities of private interviews with the King, and it was therefore coveted by the Vicomte de Choiseul, the nephew of the Prime Minister, and the Duc d'Aiguillon, the nephew of the Maréchal de Richelieu.

Much to the surprise of the courtiers the latter was successful, and it was said that the King's mistress, who had no reason to love the Choiseul clan, had used all her influence for D'Aiguillon. The Duc de Choiseul began to perceive that in a contest between the "alcove" and the "back-stairs" the latter is not always certain to win, and no doubt he felt mortified, for the check he had met with was a double one. Not only had he been unsuccessful in getting his candidate nominated, but the person

who had gained was the man whom he most feared.

That the proud and haughty Minister was disquieted is proved by the fact that he called to see Madame du Barry and had an interview with her that lasted more than three hours. Madame du Deffand, who was a warm partisan of Choiseul, says in one of her letters to Walpole, "the interview was a false step on his part, and has produced no good effect." It was hardly to be expected that he would consent to "climb down" at once after he had enjoyed undisputed power so long. His sister, the Duchesse de Gramont, was on a visit to Holland at this time; had she been at Fontainebleau it is very likely that the Duc de Choiseul would not have been permitted to make any attempts at reconciliation.

During the stay at Fontainebleau the King and his mistress paid a visit to the pavilion that the *fermier général* Bouret had constructed in the forest of Senart, in commemoration of a visit which the King had paid him some years before. Like many of the *fermiers*, he was a man of immense wealth though he had half ruined himself in erecting and embellishing this pavilion which he further improved every year. His motives for so doing were not altogether disinterested, for he had hoped that Madame de Pompadour would take a liking to the pavilion and that the King would purchase it for her, but her death temporarily destroyed his hopes which, however, revived again on the accession of Madame du Barry.

Knowing how the King craved for amusement Bouret always took care to have a fresh surprise each year for his Master. The Royal visit was paid on September 28. The weather was splendid, the hunting was capital, (two stags were killed) and the banquet prepared by Bouret

was sumptuous. At the end of the repast the host showed the surprise he had prepared for the King. It was a statue of Venus—a copy of the one which Coustou, one of the best French sculptors of the time, had executed for the King of Prussia—but the head was changed and made into a likeness of Madame du Barry. Both the King and his mistress were much pleased with this compliment. What became of this statue is unknown. If still in existence it would have considerable interest, and corresponding value, especially if it were an original work of Coustou, or if he had modelled the head.

The only other incident which marked the stay at Fontainebleau was of a less agreeable nature. The Duc de Sarraguais obtained from Madame Gourdan, the notorious procuress, one of her *pensionnaires*, took lodgings in the town of Fontainebleau for this young person, and introduced her to all his friends as “Madame la Comtesse de Tonneau”—Tonneau being synonymous with Baril, which is pronounced the same as Barry. The joke was of the “Cyclopean order” and if the Duc’s friends were entertained thereby, we may envy the ease with which they were amused. As M. Vatel remarks, one might have expected something better from a man who had been in love with Sophie Arnould, the witty and accomplished actress. If the Duc de Sarraguais had perpetrated a similar practical joke at the expense of Madame de Pompadour he would have fared worse than the unfortunate Chevalier de Rességuier, who for having made some verses on the King’s mistress was condemned, without trial, to twenty years’ imprisonment followed by banishment. According to Dumouriez, Madame du Barry must at this moment have been considering for the last three months

the advisability of sending him (Dumouriez) to the Bastille for refusing to "worship" her, an offence apparently worse than the clumsy insult of the Duc de Larraguais, for in the latter case this "not very vindictive woman" contented herself by intimating to the offender that it would be advisable for him to visit England for a few weeks. This could hardly be considered a punishment at all, for if England be a prison—to quote the words of Rosencrantz—"then is the world one."

The principal sufferer by the Duc's pleasantry was "la Gourdan." That estimable dealer in human flesh was accustomed to take a number of her "white slaves," down to Fontainebleau each year for the convenience of those customers who found a journey to Paris inconveniently long. The old procuress was innocent of any participation in the Duc's little joke, but it is impossible to feel any sympathy for her, all the same. The police received orders to drive all the "unfortunate females" out of the town. If Madame du Barry had anything to do with this step it can hardly be made a reproach to her—but it is more likely that the measure originated with Louis XV who cordially hated vice—in other people.

When the Court left Fontainebleau is not stated, and is of no great consequence, but it was back at Versailles early in December, when Madame du Barry had again to implore the King's clemency for an offender. As usual she gained her point and saved a poor fellow from execution, making the fourth life she had saved in fewer than eight months—no light set-off against unchastity, frivolity, and extravagance, which are the worst crimes laid to her account.

The story is so charmingly told in De Belleval's *Souve-*

nirs d'un cheval-leger that we cannot do better than translate the passage, which also incidentally contains one of the best pen-portraits of Madame du Barry that we have.

7 December, 1769.

"A young man of Aumale, named Carpentier, enlisted on account of some family quarrel, about a year ago, and served in the regiment de Mestre de Camp Général, which was in garrison at Provins. His conduct was satisfactory, but one fine day he was seized with homesickness, so he declares, and deserted, and—which was more grave still—with his uniform and horse, which he intended to send back, he said, after he had gone two or three posts. The officers of the regiment, which was then under the command of the Chevalier d'Abense, Camp Master commanding, tried poor Carpentier, who only replied with tears, and condemned him to death.

"I received at Versailles a letter from M. d'Abense relating the affair, stating that the poor wretch implored my aid, saying that I should not forsake him if I knew his sad fate;—that for disciplinary reasons the officers had been obliged to condemn him, but that they all pitied poor Carpentier; and finally that M. d'Abense had granted a respite in order to give me the time to do what I could. I soon made up my mind what to do, and ran off to the Duc d'Aiguillon, to whom I usually had recourse. At the first words I uttered, he cried, 'It is not I who can obtain that from the King, but the Comtesse du Barry. Come back, presently with your petition, and I will take you to her; that is the surest means of obtaining pardon for your protégé.' At the hour stated I presented myself at the Duc d'Aiguillon's house, in full

uniform, and he, faithful to his promise, was waiting for me, and went straight to the favourite like one for whom the doors are always open.

"I had already often seen the Countess, but from afar; sufficiently well to allow me to judge of her renowned beauty in the *ensemble*, but not well enough to study the details of it. She was carelessly sitting, or rather it may be said lying on a large *fauteuil*, and wore a dress with garlands of roses on a white ground, which I can see even now as I write, fifteen years afterwards.

"Madame du Barry was one of the prettiest women at Court, where there were so many, and certainly the most bewitching, on account of the perfections of her person. Her hair, which she often wore without powder, was fair, and a most beautiful colour, and she had such a profusion of it that she did not know what to do with it. Her blue eyes, widely open, had a kindly and frank expression, and she fixed them upon those to whom she spoke, and seemed to follow in their faces the effect of her words. She had a tiny nose, a very small mouth, and a complexion of dazzling whiteness. She instantly fascinated every one, and that happened to me, for I was so impressed that I almost forgot my petition in the delight of gazing at her. I was then about twenty-five years old. She quickly noticed my confusion, as did also the Duc d'Aiguillon, who neatly turned it off with one of those compliments he knows so well how to make. I then presented my petition, adding some explanations, and dwelling forcibly on the necessity there was for haste, and the hopes we placed in her of saving the life of the unfortunate Carpentier.

"'I promise to speak to the King, sir,' she replied to

me, 'and I hope that His Majesty will not refuse me this favour. The Duc knows well that his friends are my friends, and I thank him for not forgetting that,' she added, turning towards him with a charming smile. She then questioned me about my family, and how long I had served, and dismissed us, telling me that I should soon have news from her. She gave her hand to the Duc d'Aiguillon, who kissed it, saying, 'That is for the Captain-Lieutenant—is there nothing for the company?' which made her laugh, and she bestowed upon me the same favour, of which I quickly took advantage.

"The next day, when I was on guard, a lackey, in the well-known livery of the Comtesse, and who had been to our hotel to ask for me, came, and said that his mistress expected me at six o'clock. At the hour named, I presented myself at the door of her apartment and was ushered in. There were a great number of persons, and the King was also there, standing with his back against the chimney-piece. On perceiving me Madame du Barry said to His Majesty, 'Sire, here is my light-horseman, who comes to thank your Majesty.'

"'Thank, in the first place, Madame la Comtesse,' said Louis XV to me, 'and tell your protégé that if I pardon him, he must, by attention to my service, cause the fault of which he has been guilty to be forgotten.' I do not well know what I replied to the King, but the Duc d'Aiguillon, who was present, assured me that I said all that was necessary, and that the King was satisfied with me, and very much pleased that Madame du Barry had been chosen to ask for Carpentier's pardon. The same evening the good news was sent off to Provins, where the poor fellow was expecting his death. He afterwards made

a good soldier and became an example to the regiment.

"Madame du Barry was good-natured, and loved to oblige others;—of which this story is a proof the more to add to the others. No one can deny that, not even her worst enemies, and she was very different in that respect from Madame de Pompadour, who never forgot an insult, and did not know what it was to forgive one. Madame du Barry never bore ill-will, and was the first to laugh at all the songs which were made about her. I was astonished—as she had not been brought up to it—to see how quickly she had caught the tone and manners of the ladies of the Court. She often lets fall some risky phrases, such as they are not accustomed to hear at Versailles, but she knows her book, and never allows herself complete freedom of speech but when with the King, who is amused at the novelty of the thing.

"The story, which I told my comrades, of the goodness of the Comtesse, was received with loud applause, and Vicomte du Barry, our cornet, heard nothing but compliments and praises of his young aunt. We always believe that he related these to her, for she ever after showed a marked preference for the light horse, above all the troops of the household brigade. For my part, I was always afterwards treated with kindness, and I often met her at the house of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, to whom she was greatly attached on account of her husband. I never visited her rooms but twice afterwards, and that was to look for M. d'Aiguillon on business connected with the regiment, when I had not found him at his house and the matter was urgent. But the place of a plain soldier was not in the midst of all the courtiers who thronged her apartment to pay their court to her, or to meet His

Majesty there. She felt that and had the delicacy (though she treated me very kindly when I met her) to never ask me why I did not come to see her—as a good many women would have done. It was a different thing at the Duc d'Aiguillon's, as he was our commander, and the 'red-coats' were often seen there; or at the Maréchale de Mirepoix's, where I went pretty frequently. 'Ah! there is my light horseman,' was the phrase which the Comtesse never failed to use when she saw me, and then she would ask if there was anything she could do for me. As I invariably replied there was not, she said at last, 'He always answers "no"; when there are so many others who would answer "yes." My dear Duc, are they all like that in your company?'

"Assuredly not," replied the Duc d'Aiguillon, and the laughter which followed seemed as though it would never cease."

It would be difficult for even the most practised novelist to improve upon this scene. The actors are all natural because the young soldier did not attempt (as a young literary man would have done) to *make* them natural. The confusion and bashfulness of De Belleval; the old courtier coming to his friend's relief with a timely compliment; Du Barry lying with studied negligence in her arm-chair, pleased—as every pretty woman would be—to see the effect of her marvellous beauty; the old King moodily leaning against the chimney-piece; are all perfect sketches. Noticeable, too, are the words used by the King, "Thank, *in the first place (d'abord)*, Madame la Comtesse." Louis was pleased with De Belleval for having had the happy thought to present the request through Madame du Barry,

though the idea really originated with the Duc d'Aiguillon. The King—never very merciful—was particularly severe on desertion, and seldom pardoned a soldier who was guilty of that offence. A curious custom prevailed that if a deserter was arrested and, on his way to prison, chanced to meet the King, he was pardoned. Louis, when quite a young man, did once meet a deserter in this manner, and pardoned him. A few days later a soldier, who had deserted, but had not been arrested, begged the Comtesse de Toulouse to implore his pardon of the King. She pleaded for him, but finding she could not succeed, endeavoured to gain her point by a stratagem. The man was arrested in such a manner that he and his escort met the King on his road to the hunt. The deserter asked for the customary pardon, but the King, who saw through the trick, appeared embarrassed, and ordered the escort to take their prisoner to gaol. It was pointed out to the King that the man, who had been in hiding, had suffered himself to be arrested in the hope of obtaining the Royal pardon, and therefore it would not be right to take advantage of his surrender. "His Majesty thereupon ordered that the prison doors should be opened to him, which was done; but he did not receive a pardon." What became of this particular deserter is not stated, but it is most likely that he was re-arrested and shot. The anecdote shows, however, that Louis XV was not apt to overlook desertion, though it is true that in the case of Carpentier all the officers who constituted the court-martial had recommended the prisoner to mercy, and the President had even asked De Belleval to procure the man's pardon, if possible.

Madame du Barry appears not only to have willingly

aided in doing a good action, but to have done it gracefully. There is not a trace in her language of the vulgarity and coarseness which many writers ascribe to the favourite. On the contrary De Belleval is astonished to find how quickly she has picked up the manners of the Court, and he adds—though presumably on hearsay evidence—that she reserved her vulgarity for when she was alone with the King. Certainly there is no vulgarity in her language or conduct, as recorded in this incident, and De Belleval says that in her after conduct towards him she displayed a tact and delicacy that would have been found wanting in many a high-born lady.

A plain soldier, De Belleval thought, had no business among the courtiers who crowded the salons of Madame du Barry to pay their court to the favourite, or to approach the King, who was an almost daily visitor there. He therefore abstained from further visits, and Madame du Barry not only appreciated his motives, but considerably forbore from pressing him with invitations which he would have had a difficulty in refusing. Yet Dumouriez would ask us to believe that she sent *him* to the Bastille for the very same conduct which she thought sensible in De Belleval,—a curious proof of what a difference the mental standpoint makes in the manner in which two men will regard a similar occurrence.

CHAPTER VI

MARIE ANTOINETTE AND MADAME DU BARRY

THE year 1770 opened (says Pidansat de Mairobert) with an incident which "did great credit to the new mistress." Here is the story as he relates it.

"The first of January Madame du Barry entered the King's room in high spirits, and told him that she had come to ask for her New Year's gift,—namely the *loges* of Nantes, worth about forty thousand francs a year, and which had formerly belonged to the Duchesse de Larraguais; she added that it was for her dear friend the Maréchale de Mirepoix. The King smiled and replied, 'Madam, I am sorry not to be able to grant you this favour; it is already disposed of.' The fair Countess began to pout, and replied, 'Very well! that makes the fourth favour that I have asked and you have refused me. The devil take me if I ever ask for anything again.'—'You are grumbling too soon,' replied His Majesty. 'You begin the year very badly.'—'And you begin it much worse,' retorted the favourite, more angry still. 'Your reproach will not make me change my mind,' said her august lover, gazing at her tenderly. 'It only confirms me in my resolution. It is very good of you to be so warmly interested for your friend, but once more I tell you there is nothing to

be done; this present is promised, and would you like to know to whom, Madam? It is for you; it is the gift I have reserved for you,' and at the same time he kissed her. Madame du Barry made haste to inform everyone of the King's gift, and the gallant and witty manner in which it had been bestowed. The courtiers extolled her conduct, which, if not over-respectful, showed the frank, open, generous nature of the Comtesse."

The story is true in the main, but it did not happen quite so dramatically as Pidansat makes out.

In the first place it may be as well to explain what the *loges* of Nantes were. On the counterscarp of the fortification of that town many shops, houses, booths and sheds were erected, and it was the rent of these structures which was called *les loges*. Only a year before, the King had bestowed this lucrative property on the Duchesse de Brancas de Larraguais, but she died before she had received more than a few months' rent, and it was perhaps on that account that the gift to Madame du Barry was conditional on her paying thirty thousand francs to the heirs of the late Duchesse.

When Madame du Barry came to Court she required a duenna, or "sheep-dog,"—some old lady well-acquainted with the multifarious details of the routine and etiquette of Court life. The Maréchale de Mirepoix obtained this post, and received, it is said, a hundred thousand francs a year for her services, but the old lady strongly objected to this sum being called a "salary,"—it was a gift from her dear friend the Comtesse du Barry. It is to be feared that this casuistical distinction was not due to any moral objection to be considered the paid servant of a courtesan, but rather to the fact that the Maréchale was a confirmed

mendicant and was always begging the King to pay her debts, and by regarding the handsome sum she received from Madame du Barry as a "wind-fall" she avoided the necessity of including it in her income on the frequent occasions on which she sent a tabulated statement of her assets and liabilities to Louis XV.

One of these begging letters is still extant, and deserves to be quoted briefly. The Maréchale de Mirepoix begins by stating that her entire fortune consists of

A pension of	12,000 francs.
Another of	8,000 "
A yearly gratification of	12,000 "
A salary as " <i>dame du palais</i> " of	6,000 "
And, for entire patrimony, rents from Lorraine amounting to	24,000 "
	<u>62,000 francs</u>

or nearly £ 2500, which, when money went nearly three times as far as it does now, might not be considered a bad income. She goes on to state that her indispensable expenses amount every year to eighty thousand francs, with the result that there is an annual deficit of eighteen thousand francs, which, as she naïvely remarks, occasions a considerable disorder in her affairs. Hence it follows—for reasons which Mr. Micawber would have been happy to explain to her—that she is constantly liable to writs, executions, and "all sorts of humiliations," of which, like a good many other people, she "ardently desires to get rid," in order that she may "obtain that tranquillity, which she has long desired in vain, more particularly as she is anxious to consecrate the remainder of her days to doing everything that may be agreeable to His Majesty." She unselfishly proposes to give a lien on her estates in return for

a pension of forty thousand francs, which, with her other pensions and salaries, will make a total of seventy-eight thousand francs.

This application is dated March, 1770. At the foot is written, "By Command of the King. Order to pay 20,000 francs." Less than three months previously, on January 15, in the same year, there had been another petition from her, couched as follows,

"His Majesty has been kind enough to grant the Maréchale de Mirepoix a special *gratification* of twelve thousand livres for each of the years 1766, 1767, and 1768. The necessities which caused this favour of the King still existing, Madame la Maréchale de Mirepoix begs the King to grant her the same *gratification* for the year 1769."

On this also is written, "By the King's command. Order for 12,000 livres."

Louis XV felt that he had done enough for this insatiable old lady, and therefore determined to present this valuable property to his mistress, though he might doubtless have found with very little trouble a more deserving recipient of his bounty, for the income derived from the *loges* of Nantes would have saved from want and misery the widow of some brave officer, and would not have sufficed to pay a month's jewellery bill of Madame du Barry.

We must dismiss as fictitious, however, Pidansat's account of Madame du Barry bouncing into the King's room on the morning of New Year's Day, asking for this important privilege for her friend, and pouting like a spoiled child because she did not get it. No doubt Madame du Barry did ask the gift for her friend, and it is absolutely certain she obtained it herself, for the brevet is still in existence, and as it is dated December 23, 1769, it rather

spoils the dramatic effect of the "Anecdote," though Pidansat has in this case, perhaps involuntarily, come much nearer the truth than is usual with him.

During the first two months of 1770 there appears to have been an armed peace between De Choiseul and Madame du Barry. She was not likely to move unless attacked, and he was busy strengthening his position, and arranging the marriage of one of the most celebrated and unfortunate couples known to history. On May 16, 1770, Louis Auguste, Dauphin of France, grandson of Louis XV, was married in the chapel at Versailles to Marie Antoinette of Lorraine, Archduchess of Austria, daughter of Maria Theresa.

The marriage was the work of the Duc de Choiseul; in one of the letters of Maria Theresa to her daughter she recommends her never to forget that, and Marie Antoinette never did. Many of the Memoir writers seem to think that the inimical feeling displayed by the Dauphiness towards the Royal Mistress was due to the fact that, out of gratitude to Choiseul, she regarded his enemies as her enemies. Some of the other writers, however, maintain that Marie Antoinette found Madame du Barry "charming and adorable," and one—who is far from being trustworthy, however—asserts that the Dauphiness, duly mindful of the instructions of her mother, went so far as to kiss the favourite.¹

Maria Theresa certainly, both in letters to her daughter and to the Austrian Ambassador, recommended "holding a candle to the devil," but the Archduchess practically ignored the advice. It is very possible that, at first, a

¹ CAPEFIGUE, *Reines de la Main gauche*, p. 98.

virtuous, young girl, too happy and too beautiful to be jealous, might have been attracted by the resplendent beauty of the fair Comtesse, but that feeling did not last long. Marie Antoinette, who was less than fifteen when she was married, was so innocent that she asked one of the courtiers, shortly after her arrival at Versailles, "What position Madame du Barry occupied, and what were her duties?" The courtier rather taken aback by the question, replied that "she amused the King."

"Then I swear I will take her place!" cried the young Archduchess, at which, we may fancy, the courtier discreetly coughed. Later on she learned the nature of Madame du Barry's functions, and then treated the favourite with that scorn and contempt which a virtuous woman, who has been well brought up, should always evince for a fallen sister—conduct which sometimes induces a man to think that the more delicate perception of women has enabled them to detect a literal error in the First Epistle of Peter, and that it is Chastity, not Charity, which "shall cover the multitude of sins."

The universal prevalence of this feeling, which has endured from the days of Diana downwards, renders it unnecessary to imagine that Madame du Barry aroused the wrath of the Dauphiness by making spiteful observations about her. That Du Barry was jealous of the superior beauty of Marie Antoinette seems very improbable. Sympathy for the sad fate of the unfortunate Queen—and which, strange to say, is never expended upon Madame du Barry who met precisely the same death—has caused several generations of men to see in her face a surpassing loveliness, but a man who could divest himself of this exoteric influence and unimpassionedly compare the portraits of both women,

might not impossibly find the mistress the lovelier of the two. But, even granting the question to be doubtful, it must be remembered that in 1770 Jeanne du Barry was twenty-six, and consequently in the full perfection of her beauty (which physiologists assert is not attained before twenty-five), whilst Marie Antoinette had not completed her fifteenth year, and that is usually considered an "ugly age" for a girl. There were several reasons why the Princess should cordially dislike the favourite, but the feeling was not reciprocated to any extent, though Du Barry did show a short-lived indignation at some of the acts of Marie Antoinette.

Nettled by the scorn of the Princess it is not improbable that Madame du Barry may have made use of some caustic remarks, but, if so, they never went farther than the King's ears, and as he, though liking to make mischief as a general rule, would have passed a bad quarter of an hour with his mistress if he had betrayed her confidence, he is pretty certain not to have repeated her abusive language. The statements in several well-known histories about Madame du Barry ridiculing the Dauphin and Dauphiness, have been evolved by the writers out of their inner consciousness, or are repetitions of stories told by partisans of the Choiseul faction.¹

¹ She (Madame du Barry) renders the Dauphin ridiculous in the King's eyes. She has especially made impudent attacks on the Dauphiness. She, who has trodden under foot every decency of her sex, or perhaps never knew any, relates with bitterness every trifling offence of this young Princess against the laws of etiquette. LACRETELLE, *Histoire de France pendant le 18ème siècle*, Liv. XIV. 4. 346.

The National Archives at Vienna contain the letters which passed between Maria Theresa and her daughter, and also the instructions given to the Austrian Ambassador at Versailles, Comte Mercy d'Argenteau, and his reports on the conduct of the young Princess. The Empress dwells constantly on the necessity for being on good terms with the Mistress, and her daughter as resolutely refuses to speak at all to Madame du Barry, whilst it may easily be imagined that the position of the Ambassador is far from being a comfortable one. In the first letter of Marie Antoinette to her mother in which Madame du Barry is mentioned (dated July 9, 1770), she says,

"The King does me a thousand kindnesses, and I love him tenderly, but it is pitiable to see his infatuation for Madame du Barry, who is the most foolish and impertinent creature imaginable. She played every evening whilst we were at Marly, and on two or three occasions I found myself by her side, but she did not speak to me, and I did not intend to speak unless I was obliged." Only three days later Marie Antoinette again writes, "I forgot to tell you that I wrote yesterday for the first time to the King. I was very frightened, knowing that Madame du Barry reads everything. But you may be quite sure, my very dear mother, that I shall commit no fault either for her or against her."

The Ambassador in reply to a letter from the Empress (saying that there are rumours in Vienna that the Princess had offended the Mistress and that the King had taken umbrage in consequence) assures Maria Theresa that the Dauphiness had behaved discreetly, and that he will keep a sharp eye on her actions, the better to do which he has bribed one of her maids and two of her footmen or ushers

to tell him everything that goes on in Marie Antoinette's apartment. This last seems hardly a dignified proceeding on the part of an Ambassador, and goes far to justify Madame Elizabeth's description of him as "an old rascal, more apt to deceive the Empress than to enlighten her." Madame Elizabeth was, however, prejudiced against him because she was no doubt aware that he had informed Maria Theresa, that "the daughters of Louis XV use the Dauphiness as a cat's paw, and excite her to an enmity against Madame du Barry which they dare not show themselves." The Princesses Rag, Snip, and Pig—as their affectionate father termed them—also knew, most likely, that Comte Mercy d'Argenteau had had a long interview with Madame du Barry with the object of inducing her to believe that the Dauphiness did not really regard her with "an eye of aversion" but acted at the instigation of "Mesdames her aunts."

We are so prone to picture to ourselves Marie Antoinette as she was in her last days, that we experience a difficulty in imagining that she was ever anything else. Painters have depicted, hundreds of times, the ill-starred Queen regarding her murderers with a calm, lofty, noble scorn, her pale, handsome face stamped with the beauty of the deepest sorrow borne with resignation; and the recollection of one of these presentments comes into our mind at the mere mention of her name. But sympathy for her fate must not blind us to the fact that she herself was distinctly unsympathetic. She had not the secret of winning men's hearts. In spite of Burke's impassioned prose, it was never likely that ten thousand swords would leap from their scabbards to avenge a look that threatened her with insult, for she lacked that subtle magnetism which sways

men's minds and makes them willing to die for the person who possesses it. Marie Antoinette had, when young, rather a sarcastic and mocking tongue, and the dangerous habit of showing too plainly her likes and dislikes. A score of proofs of this could be found in the notes of contemporary writers; we will content ourselves with quoting one only of these observers, M. de Belleval, whose straightforward, honest account of men, women, and doings renders his little book as useful to the student of history as it is entertaining to the general reader. He says,

"The Dauphiness detested the favourite, as did also the Dauphin, and neither of them lost an occasion of showing it. But in our company of light horse, and amongst a great number of other people, this Princess was not greatly loved; she had the misfortune of not being able to govern her tongue, and the habit of making fun of everybody. She had said, amongst other things, that she did not like those 'red-coats' you met everywhere at Versailles, meaning by that the *maison rouge*, that is to say the 'gendarmes,' the musketeers, and the light horse, and this remark became known throughout the companies and prepossessed the men against her. We were, moreover, attached to Monsieur d'Aiguillon who treated us very kindly. The Dauphin and Dauphiness hated him, and we supported our captain-lieutenant. We were then, for the most part, *Barriens*, as was said then, to signify those who were of the party of Madame du Barry against the Duc de Choiseul, who was stiff, haughty, and too much of the great lord, qualities which spoiled this great statesman and deep politician. His sister, the Duchesse de Gramont, who was as disagreeable as possible, and as mischievous as the devil, did him the greatest possible

harm, and there were people who did not belong to his party, because they disliked her. The beauty of Madame du Barry, and the radiancy of her youth choked her, and she was annoyed at not being able to preserve her place near His Majesty. She affected to treat the King's mistress with profound disdain, but the devil lost nothing by that."

Although she had been married only a few weeks, poor Marie Antoinette had, it will be seen, already made herself unpopular with at least three companies of the household troops. As for the Dauphin's detestation of the favourite, Comte Mercy d'Argenteau gives a curious account of how it arose. We quote a portion of a letter written to the Empress Maria Theresa on July 14, 1770.

"This Prince (the Dauphin) had for some time past evinced a great desire to be invited to the suppers at Saint Hubert, where the King made frequent hunting parties. The Duc de Saint Mégrin, son of M. de la Vauguyon, was directed by his father to make known the Dauphin's wishes to Madame du Barry, and she did not fail to inform the King, who gave his consent, so that, from that day, the Dauphin took part in all the excursions and remained to supper, and consequently was to some degree initiated into those parties of pleasure where the favourite plays the chief part, and where decency is not always scrupulously observed. However, there resulted from this arrangement an effect quite different from that which had been anticipated; for Mesdames de France alarmed at the danger into which the Dauphin was running, let him know what the favourite was, and informed him of the most striking incidents of her life, and the disturbances that her presence at Court occasioned. This information made such a strong impression on the

Dauphin that since that time he has shown frequent signs of disgust for the Comtesse du Barry, who certainly will never again be viewed favourably by the Prince."

With all due respect to Comte Mercy d'Argenteau it seems hardly possible to believe this account. To ask us to imagine that the Dauphin had lived two years under the same roof as Madame du Barry without knowing that she was his grandfather's mistress is making rather too heavy a call on our credulity, especially when viewed in conjunction with the fact that his child-wife was made fully aware of the favourite's position a few days after she arrived in France. It is the most astounding testimonial to the purity of the moral atmosphere of Versailles; but one cannot help wondering why the old King, who had taken such pains that his grandson should be utterly ignorant of all evil, should suddenly have admitted him to hunting suppers where "decency was not always scrupulously observed."

The dislike of Marie Antoinette for the favourite was accentuated by an incident which occurred almost on the very day on which this letter was written. The Court was then at Choisy. At a theatrical entertainment given to the Court in a small theatre, or room which served as a theatre, some of the ladies-in-waiting refused to make room for the Comtesse du Barry and her two friends, the Duchesse de Mirepoix, and the Comtesse de Valentinois. A quarrel ensued in which Madame du Barry appears to have taken no part, for if she had come out in her native vulgarity one of her enemies would have reported it. One of the ladies who refused to give way to the King's favourite, was the *Comtesse* de Gramont, who is not to be confounded with the *Duchesse* de Gramont—a mistake

which Horace Walpole made at first, till he was set right by Madame du Deffand. The Comtesse was the sister-in-law of the Duchesse;—a lively young widow who is described as foolish, impudent, and talkative.¹ She seems to have displayed all these qualities, and to have made some remarks about Madame du Barry, which the Mistress repeated to the King. Louis XV was morbidly sensitive about insults to his Mistress, his conscience, or what there was left of it, telling him that all reflections upon her struck him, and he ordered the Comtesse de Gramont not to come within fifteen leagues of the Court.

The Comtesse de Gramont was one of the ladies-in-waiting of the Dauphiness, and Marie Antoinette's hatred of Madame du Barry was certainly not lessened by this *contretemps*. Several other ladies were concerned in the scandal, but the Comtesse was selected as an example for punishment.

Three months later the Comtesse wrote to Marie Antoinette to say that her health was so bad she required to come to Paris for medical advice, and begged the Dauphiness to ask the King's permission. Marie Antoinette at once did so, but the King's reply was that he would consider the application. Marie Antoinette pressed the point, and said, "Consider, papa, what a disgrace it would be for me if one of my ladies-in-waiting died in exile;" at which the King laughed, and replied, "Madam, I have executed your orders." He had not, however, executed the "orders," and had no intention of doing so, for more than two-years later (1773) we find Marie

¹ MADAME DU DEFFAND, *Letter to Horace Walpole*.

Antoinette again petitioned the King for her friend and met with a sharp rebuff in consequence.

As Madame du Barry was the cause of the banishment of the Comtesse, and was the offended party, she was asked to intercede for the pardon of the lady-in-waiting, but, though not very vindictive, she did not appear willing to take any steps, being in all probability aware that the King had made up his mind on the subject, and was not easily to be moved. Her influence over him was undoubtedly great, but he was not, as some historians imagine, her slave, and so fascinated by her charms that he was ready to blindly obey her least wish. The best proof of the contrary is found in the fact that at this very time—the latter part of 1770—he was thinking about getting married to an Austrian Archduchess. In the *Correspondance secrète* are two letters which cast a curious light on the King's proceedings. The first is addressed to the Comte de Broglie, who was head of the "Secret Correspondence" department, and who had several times acted as one of the agents of Louis.

"Versailles, 6 June, 1770.

"As one never knows what may happen, if Durand has not left, show him this letter, or if otherwise, send him a copy in cypher. Let him carefully examine, from head to feet, forgetting nothing that it is possible to see, the Archduchess Elizabeth, and let him even learn all he can of her character, but let it all be done in the greatest secrecy, and without raising any suspicion at Vienna, and let him give me an account of her, without hurrying himself, on some safe occasion."

The other letter is worth quoting *in extenso* for it not

only contains a passing mention of the Archduchess, but there is a good deal about Madame du Barry. It seems to have been written rather later in the year, possibly not long before the dismissal of Choiseul—an event that Louis was certainly contemplating when he wrote this letter, for he was never so dangerous as when he was complimentary. His letters are not easy to read; he wrote long paragraphs, unrelieved by a single comma or period, and with all the sentences running into one another. The spelling, too, was original and peculiar, and he had a habit of adding an *s* to the third person plural of verbs which is not without its utility to the student, as it enables his unsigned instructions to his agents to be easily identified.

“You will find a Letter in this packet from M. de Fuentes containing praises of you which are quite true.

“I begin with M. d’Aiguillon how can you imagine that he can replace you, I like him well enough, it is true, on account of the trick that I served him a long time ago, but hated as he is what good could he do?

“You manage my business very well, and I am satisfied with you, but beware of those around you, and advisers—that is what I have always disliked and detest more than ever. You know Madame du Barry, it was certainly not M. de Richelieu who introduced her to me although he knew her, and he dare not see her, and the only time he did see her for a moment was by my express order. I thought I knew her before her marriage she is pretty I am satisfied and I recommend her every day to beware also of those who surround her and advise her, for you may well believe they are not wanting she has no dislike to you, she knows your mind and wishes you no harm

the exasperation against her has been frightful and unjust for the most part, they would be at her feet—that is the way of the world.

“She is very pretty she pleases me that ought to suffice. Do you want me to marry a lady of rank if the archduchess were such as I should desire her to be I would take her to wife with great pleasure for there must be an end of this and the fair sex otherwise would always trouble me, for very surely you will not see on my part a dame de Maintenon. And that I think is enough for this time. I have no need to recommend secrecy to you about all this, my writing is no better than yours.¹”

The story of the fall of Choiseul, and the part which Madame du Barry bore in it, will be related in the next chapter.

¹ The translation of this letter is as literal as is consistent with sense, in order to give the reader an idea of the King's epistolary style.

CHAPTER VII

"HE FELL, LIKE AUTUMN FRUIT THAT MELLOWED LONG"

ONE of the heaviest charges brought against Madame du Barry is that of having procured the dismissal of the most capable statesman of whom France could boast, and thereby having drawn upon her unfortunate country an era of misrule which culminated in the Revolution. Authors of every degree of trustworthiness, from the grand old Scotsman who would rather have cut off his right hand than have knowingly published a lie, to the crafty blackmailers Thevenot and Mairobert, to whom truth was an occasional and rare visitant, have repeated this statement so often and so authoritatively that it may be the height of foolhardy presumption for one with no more weight than the present writer to cast doubts upon a tradition that is seemingly so well-founded.

The fact is that nearly all the contemporary writers of Memoirs, who were supposed to be in a position to know the state of affairs—as for instance Besenval and Madame du Deffand—were warm partisans of the Duc de Choiseul. His downfall appeared to them so astonishing that it was only explicable by one of two causes; either it was due to the machinations of Madame du Barry, or it was a voluntary act on the part of the Duc, who felt too virtuous

to exist longer in the contaminated atmosphere of the Court.

The latter theory has but few exponents, for though Versailles was an Armida Palace, Choiseul was a very unlikely person to play Rinaldo; but the former has been generally accepted, and is believed by historians to the present day. It has even received the sanction of Carlyle, who, on almost the first page of his *French Revolution*, says,

"For stout Choiseul would discern in the Dubarry nothing but a wonderfully dizen'd Scarlet Woman; and go on his way as if she were not. Intolerable: the source of sighs, tears, of pettings and poutings: which would not end till 'France' (La France, as she named her royal valet) finally mastered heart to see Choiseul; and with that quivering in the chin (*tremblement du menton* natural in such cases) faltered out a dismissal; dismissal of his last substantial man, but pacification of his scarlet-woman." Considerably more than half a century has elapsed since these words were penned, and the researches of men who were then unborn have cast fresh light upon historical facts,—not always to the advantage of "poor agitated Besenval," from whom Carlyle took the account he has given us of the fall of Choiseul.

As for Pidansat de Mairobert he is hardly worth the trouble of refuting, but as a sample of his general truthfulness—*ex uno disce omnes*—we will give the copy of the King's letter, ordering the Duc de Choiseul into exile, as it is printed in the *Anecdotes*.

"My Cousin,

"The dissatisfaction caused by your services compels me to exile you to Chanteloup, whither you will betake yourself

within twenty-four hours. I should have sent you much farther, if it were not for the particular esteem I have for Madame de Choiseul, in whose health I am much interested. Take care that your conduct does not make me take other steps. With which I pray God, my cousin, to have you in His holy keeping.

“ Louis.”

This version, due to the inventive talent of Pidansat de Mairobert, was copied into various journals and books, and was accepted as authentic for upwards of fifty years, till, in 1829, M. Gabriel de Choiseul published an article in the *Revue de Paris*. As a relative of the Duc, he had access to the family papers, and was enabled to give a copy of the original letter written by the King, which ran as follows,

“ I order my cousin, the Duc de Choiseul, to place the resignation of his offices of Secretary of State and Superintendent of Posts, in the hands of the Duc de La Vrillière, and to retire to Chanteloup until fresh orders on my part.

“ Versailles, this 24th day of December 1770.

“ Louis.”

Someone has said that if you give a lie twenty-four hours' start it will always keep ahead of the truth; how much more must this be the case when the lie has fifty years' start, and is about a woman whose reputation was so tainted,—for the wording of the letter, though not the actual writing of it, is ascribed to Madame du Barry, and is even now quoted as an exhibition of feminine spite.¹

¹ Pidansat de Mairobert's version is given as the correct one in a book dated 1883.

That the King's mistress should have compassed the fall of the Prime Minister was extremely natural. She had, ranged against her, the three most powerful persons in the kingdom, the Dauphin, the Dauphiness, and the Duc de Choiseul, and to oppose this coalition, nothing but the hold which her beauty gave her over the notoriously fickle, feeble, and unstable King. Against the two former she could do nothing, and it would therefore have been good generalship on her part to attack that wing of the enemy's forces where she was alone likely to obtain a victory. Besides, of the three, Choiseul was the most inveterate and implacable foe. By dint of constant prodding, Mesdames of France had persuaded their nephew that he ought to dislike the favourite, but that notable lack of decision which helped to bring him to the scaffold, rendered him, throughout all his life, of small account as either an active friend or foe. Madame du Barry is said also to have offended the young Prince by insinuating that he was impotent. If she did say so it was a very natural remark, for if Louis XV thought it was time he had "*finished with the beau sexe*," his grandson did not think it time to begin, and though he had been married four months to a young and beautiful Princess had never had the courage or the inclination to enter her bed-room. He did at last inform Marie Antoinette that he would visit her on a certain night, and she mentioned this to one of her ladies-in-waiting, who made it known to someone else. In a few hours it was buzzed all about the Court, and reached the Dauphin himself, who was so annoyed with the Dauphiness for having betrayed his confidence that he refused to carry out his promise, and postponed it indefinitely. If this amazing

degree of chastity did call forth a sneer of contempt from Madame du Barry it is small matter for surprise, for the feeling must have been generally shared by all the courtiers, whilst the Dauphin for his part felt little sympathy with persons like Madame du Barry.

The antipathy of Marie Antoinette to Madame du Barry was only the intolerable scorn of a good young woman, who has been brought up properly, for a courtesan, especially when the courtesan is exercising undue influence over a relative of the virtuous person. But being a very dutiful daughter, the Dauphiness, though she had too much pride to show any marked deference to the Mistress—as her mother would have wished—was more lukewarm in her hostility than Choiseul and his friends liked. She pouted prettily when—having invited the King to supper—she saw him arrive with Madame du Barry, and said merrily, “Sire, I asked you for one favour; you have granted me two!”

Her mother’s morality was not tuned to so high a pitch, and hardly a week went by without the arrival of a courier from Vienna with letters for the Dauphiness and the Ambassador. To her daughter Maria Theresa writes on one occasion, “You ought to set an example to the Court and courtiers, to show that you do your Master’s will. If any base action, or familiarities, were required of you, neither I nor anyone else would ask such things, but you are asked only to make some commonplace remark and to show some regard, not for the lady, but for your grandfather, your master, your benefactor.” The Ambassador, also, was instructed to repress any tendency the Dauphiness might show to behave with coldness or rudeness to Madame du Barry, and had definite

orders to explain away or apologise for any affront to which the favourite might be subjected. To most men this duty would have been intolerable, but Comte Mercy d'Argenteau appears from his letters to have rather liked it, or at least pretended he did. He writes to the Empress, in September 1771,

"Your Majesty will have deigned to observe, in my first humble report, that the Dauphin had approved of my representations as to the advisability of the Dauphiness not treating Madame du Barry too harshly. This appears to me more essential than ever, because she (Madame du Barry) is the focus of all the mischief-making and petty squabbles into which the King allows himself to be dragged to show his resentment towards his children. The opportunities I have had of studying the royal favourite have enabled me to understand her. She appears to have little sense, and plenty of frivolity and vanity, but to be devoid of malice or rancour. It is easy enough to make her talk, and many times you may learn much from her indiscretion. I am sure, that if the Princess would determine to speak but a word to her, it would be easy for me to stop all these intrigues, and prevent the thousand difficulties which arise from the curious position of affairs at Court."

Maria Theresa, though an energetic and capable ruler, was almost as selfish as Louis XV, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that her sentiments were subservient to her interests. When the partition of Poland took place, she describes herself as weeping continually for the woes of that unfortunate country, but, as Frederick the Great said, "the more she cried the more she grabbed, for though she was always complaining of the very unfair

division of the country she had managed to take for her share fully five times as much as Prussia."

A similar spirit actuated her conduct in regard to her daughter with reference to the King's Mistress. In one of her numerous letters to her Ambassador she says, "We know for a certainty here, that both England and Prussia are trying to gain over Madame du Barry. You will know whether this is the case"—she has just said that she knows for a certainty that it is—"and if so you will"—and then follows the usual exordium to keep an eye on the conduct of the Dauphiness and persuade her to address a few commonplace remarks to the favourite.

It were, perhaps, to "consider the matter too curiously" to say that Madame du Barry was in some remote degree the cause of the sad fate of Marie Antoinette, but there is some foundation for the theory. The French Ambassador at the Court of Vienna at that time was the Cardinal de Rohan, and Marie Antoinette imagined, though wrongly, that it was owing to his representations that her mother sent these constant recommendations to conciliate Madame du Barry. This caused Marie Antoinette to take a strong dislike to the Cardinal. On his return to France he discovered this antipathy, and to regain her favour was led into the celebrated "Diamond Necklace" affair which was fraught with disaster for all who took part in it, made Queen Marie Antoinette intensely unpopular, and perhaps contributed in some measure to accelerate the approach of the Revolution.

The most powerful and most implacable enemy against whom Madame du Barry had to contend, was the Prime Minister, the Duc de Choiseul. Every means that he

could use to compass her disgrace, or to make the King disgusted with her, or tired of her, he had employed. From the day she first made her appearance at Court she had been made the object of more satire, abuse, and contumely than has probably ever before or since been lavished on one person, and it was an open secret that the men who penned these abusive paragraphs, biting epigrams, or savage verses were in the pay of the Prime Minister.

Finding these means fail, he had recourse to other means even more unjustifiable. At least twice did he introduce at Court beautiful women who were likely to attract the attention of the King. One of these was the wife of a Paris physician, a Madame Millon; the other was the wife of his nephew, the Marquis de Choiseul. She was a Creole, whose maiden name was Raby. Long before the ceremony of her presentation to the King, rumours were current at the Court concerning her wonderful beauty, and her even more wonderful accomplishments. Bets were freely made that Madame du Barry would have her nose put out of joint when this new divinity appeared, but either Louis XV preferred blondes to brunettes, or possibly he was afraid of the Choiseuls gaining too much influence, for he hardly noticed the charms of the young bride, and his behaviour to her was as cold as was consistent with politeness.

Although the Prime Minister was doing all in his power to procure the downfall of the favourite, and she on her side was perfectly well aware that the satirists who wrote pasquinades about her were paid out of his purse, the two enemies had to meet nearly every evening and mutually maintain a show of politeness. Naturally each was stiff and constrained in the other's presence, much

to the amusement of Louis XV, who observed them both narrowly, and, as he said, loved "to bring the cat and the dog together." Under the circumstances it would have been quite natural that Madame du Barry should have done all in her power to persuade the King to get rid of the Minister, for she must have been perfectly aware that the struggle would not end till either he had ousted her from her position or she had brought about his disgrace. In nearly every historical work in which Madame du Barry's name appears, it is related that once, at a dinner, she took a couple of oranges and threw them in the air, crying as she did so, "Jump, Choiseul! Jump, Praslin!" On another occasion, when she had discharged a man cook, she is stated to have said to the King, "I have got rid of my Choiseul; when are you going to get rid of yours?" The authenticity of these anecdotes is doubtful, but if they emanated from Pidansat de Mairobert they have an appearance of probability which does not usually mark his inventions.

But whilst it is very likely that Madame du Barry did all in her power to render the King disgusted with the Minister, it is very unlikely that she would have succeeded if she had not been aided by a powerful faction headed by the Duc d'Aiguillon, Abbé Terray, and the Chancellor, Mauplou, and even they might have proved too weak if the policy of the Duc de Choiseul had been more fully in accordance with the wishes of his Royal Master. He had committed several political faults, or what the King, rightly or wrongly, regarded as such. To examine these in detail would be outside the province of the present work, but, briefly stated, the two main grievances which the King had against him were, that he was in-

clined to support the claims of the Parliaments against the King, and that he was believed to wish to draw the country into a war with England. The latter reason especially weighed with the King, for he dreaded war, not only on account of the unpopularity which fresh losses would bring, but also on account of the expense. Even in a time of peace the soldiers, and more particularly the officers, did not receive their pay regularly. Comte St. Germain, when he reduced the number of officers of the household troops by more than one half, said sarcastically, "I might as well keep them all, for they cost the King nothing," and indeed, all the sums that dribbled into the Exchequer were needed for the King's pleasures.

There seems also to have been a lurking suspicion in the King's mind that Choiseul desired war, not because it was to the national advantage, but because he believed that in case of a war his services would be indispensable to the King. He professed, however, to do his utmost to preserve the peace of Europe, though to attain that end he had to "make a straddle,"—always a dangerous operation, and seldom attended with satisfactory results.

A quarrel was then going on between England and Spain, relative to the possession of the Falkland Islands. These islands had remained in the possession of Spain from the time of the Treaty of Utrecht, but the English erected a fort there, and threatened to drive out the Spaniards, if they would not leave the islands. The Spaniards replied by sending to Buenos Ayres for three frigates which came and bombarded the English fort, and took the garrison prisoners. As soon as the news reached England a squadron was sent out, with orders to retake the islands, unless Spain would consent to make an apology for the in-

sult to the English flag, and send back the prisoners without loss of time. The King of Spain consented to these terms on condition that the English should evacuate the islands within a certain time, and the question of possession be treated diplomatically, but England would not entertain these proposals, and demanded an unconditional acceptance of the terms, and the Spaniards, though obliged to give in, were so exasperated that, if they could have found an ally, they would willingly have declared war. To Choiseul this appeared an excellent opportunity for gaining *Kudos*, and he coquetted with both sides,—one day assuring the English Ambassador that he would personally visit the King of Spain and persuade him to accept the English demands, the next day assuring Spain that France would give her moral and practical aid in resisting the unjust claims of England.

But Louis XV knew well the dangers of this double dealing, and realised that if it became known at St. James's it would probably lead to England declaring war with France, and at the same moment swooping down on some valuable French possession. For once the secret correspondence that he kept up with Charles III of Spain and other monarchs was of some use. Perhaps also he felt that this kind of double dealing was a usurpation of the royal prerogative. The following letter from Louis XV to Charles III will suffice to show that Madame du Barry had nothing to do with the dismissal of the Duc de Choiseul. It is not dated, but the letter of Charles III in reply to it bears the date of January 2, 1771—nine days after the fall of Choiseul!

The letter written by Louis XV was sent to the French Ambassador with orders to hand it privately to the King

of Spain, and the Ambassador in his reply states that he has received, "the letter Your Majesty deigned to write to me on December 23,"—that is to say the day before the fall of the Minister.

"My Brother and Cousin,

"Your Majesty is not ignorant that a spirit of independence and fanaticism is spreading throughout my kingdom. Up to the present time I have borne this with patience and forbearance, but if I am pushed to extremities, and my Parliaments endeavour to wrest from me the sovereign authority that I hold from God alone, I am resolved to use every means to make myself obeyed. War, in these circumstances, would be a terrible disaster for me and my people. But my extreme regard for Your Majesty, the close union which exists between us, cemented as it is by our family agreement, would cause me always to forget everything else.

"My Ministers are but my instruments, and though I may feel obliged to change them, nothing can bring about a change in our affairs, and so long as I live we shall continue united. If Your Majesty can make some sacrifices to preserve peace, without loss of honour, you would render a great service to mankind and to me in particular in the circumstances in which I at present find myself. With which I pray God to keep you.

"Versailles, the——"

Charles III appears to have been able to read between the lines, and to understand that the fall of Choiseul had been already determined upon, for in his reply he says that as Choiseul was instrumental in bringing about the "family pact," his removal from office would cause the

enemies of France and Spain to imagine that there was a coolness between the two Royal Houses.

In addition to this charge, the King had reason to complain that the Due de Choiseul and his sister encouraged the Parliaments in their opposition to the King. Louis, in another letter to the King of Spain, says that "these bodies (the Parliaments) have been led away from their duty, less from principle than by instigations," and these instigations could not have proceeded from anyone else than the Prime Minister. Maria Theresa, who followed the dictum of a certain philosophical fool, and had learned how to let go a great wheel that was running down hill, found out, as soon as the Minister was dismissed, that she had never liked the Choiseuls and wrote to Comte Mercy d'Argenteau, "If you should hear at any time anything concerning the Choiseuls, and the cause of their disgrace—for their inconsistent and impertinent conduct had been tolerated so many years that that could not be the reason of their fall—I desire you to inform me." Her Ambassador appears to have been as much taken by surprise as she was, and in reply wrote a long letter of explanation. Had he been able to inform the Empress that the disgrace of the Minister had been effected by Madame du Barry he would no doubt have done so, for Maria Theresa would have been pleased to think that she had been the first to recognise the extent of the favourite's influence on the King, and the advisability of treating Madame du Barry with deference, but the reason ascribed by Comte Mercy d'Argenteau is very different. "The enemies of M. de Choiseul," he wrote to the Empress, "persuaded the King that the Duc had encouraged the Parliaments in their disobedience, and that there might be a rising in the

kingdom if the Minister were not quickly dismissed."

On the whole then we feel bound to conclude that, though Madame du Barry hated the Choiseuls as much as she was capable of hating anybody, and was, no doubt, elated at their fall, she did very little to bring about that fall, which she was powerless to achieve. Many historians, however, impute to her the whole and sole responsibility of the act. The Duc de Choiseul is pictured as a noble, high-spirited man, and the only capable statesman in the country, and he is described as being sacrificed by the King he had served so long and so faithfully, to gratify the whim of a wanton woman. To make the virtues of the disgraced Minister still more conspicuous by contrast, the Duc d'Aiguillon, who succeeded to his offices, is depicted in the worst colours. He embezzled the public money, was an arrant coward, and, as a matter of course, the lover of Madame du Barry. Carlyle has, in some degree, lent the weight of his vast authority to these statements; but Besanval, from whom he quotes, was a warm partisan of the Choiseuls, whose assertions must not be taken without caution, and in his sketch of the pre-Revolutionary times Carlyle perhaps did not evince the same care in verifying statements which marks the main body of the book.

If the Duc de Choiseul were really, as Carlyle calls him, the "last substantial man" on whom the King could rely, France was indeed badly supplied with statesmen at a time when she greatly needed them. A dexterity, which bordered dangerously near duplicity, was perhaps his most valuable merit, but he had the talent to recognise the force of public opinion, and, though deficient in many of the higher qualities of a statesman, his meas-

ures were often popular. He governed from day to day without any fixed principle. In private life he was haughty, stiff, and extravagant. In spite of the enormous salaries he drew he was always in debt, and he managed the State finances no better than his own.¹ His behaviour to Madame du Barry was not dignified, to say the least of it; nor was it consistent with the high moral tone he assumed, that he should have endeavoured to supplant Madame du Barry by finding for the King another mistress. His *Memoirs* are particularly unpleasant reading, being spoiled by an inflated self-conceit, which lessens the small historical value they have.

On the other hand, it would not be difficult to show that the Duc d'Aiguillon in no way resembled the portrait drawn by the partisans of Choiseul. As a statesman he was probably no better than the Minister he superseded, but it is doubtful if he were any worse. The point is not easily determined, for D'Aiguillon is one of the scape-goats of history, and few indeed are the writers of history who have not cast a stone at him, though the missiles vary considerably in kind. One critic asserts that he was "as bad as a Minister as he was clever as a scoundrel, and his letters to the French Ambassadors at foreign Courts are distinguished by narrow views, false reasoning, and obscurity of style"²; and more modern writers describe him as "a bad man and an incapable Minister"³; or as being "without intelligence and without courage, uncouth, and malicious, but possessed of some wit, and

¹See DARESTE: *Histoire de France*, Vol. 6. p. 593.

²*Letters of Comte de Vergennes*, French Ambassador at Stockholm, 1772.

³M. F. BARRIÈRE: *Notice sur Madame Campan*.

a deep schemer.¹" A more celebrated historian speaks of him as a "dark and deep courtier worthy of being the nephew of Richelieu, and the protégé of the Dauphin."²

As for the accusations of poltroonery and tyranny and even of *concussion* (official plunder of money), which, Carlyle says "it was easier to get 'quashed' by backstairs Influences than to get answered," they perhaps rest on very slight foundations. Whatever D'Aiguillon was he was certainly not a coward. When he was only seventeen he fought under Comte (afterwards Maréchal) de Saxe, and in the following year was present at the attack of Château Dauphin, where he was dangerously wounded in the head. No sooner was his wound healed than he took part in the siege of Coni, where he was wounded in the leg, and he was present at quite ten other sieges and battles. A young soldier, who has been in more than a dozen engagements before he has attained his twenty-first birthday, may surely be said to have established his reputation.

Nor would much backstairs influence be needed to quash the charge of cowardice brought against D'Aiguillon for his conduct at the battle of St. Cast. It was a battle in which we English may be excused for taking no interest. An English expeditionary force aided by a fleet of a hundred sail, had been harassing the coast of Brittany. The English numbered twelve thousand men under the command of General Bligh. D'Aiguillon hastily summoned such forces as he could muster in the province, marched rapidly over a hundred miles, and found the English just

¹M. LOUIS LACOUR: *Préface des Mémoires de Lauzun*.

²M. HENRI MARTIN: *History of France* (1762-64), p. 237.

on the point of re-embarking. He attacked them at once and routed them, with a loss of three thousand killed and wounded, and took eight hundred prisoners including several officers, amongst whom was Lord Frederic Cavendish, third son of the Duke of Devonshire.

The bay of St. Cast is surrounded by low hills, and on one of these, opposite the centre of the bay, stands a wind-mill. From this mill D'Aiguillon directed the movements of his troops and watched the battle. Nearly eight years later, when there was a quarrel between the local Parliament and the Lieutenant General, some Breton wit said that at the battle of St. Cast, "the troops were covered with glory, and the General was covered with meal." The epigram told, it was repeated from mouth to mouth with the usual result, and soon it was said that D'Aiguillon had *hidden himself* in a wind-mill to be out of the way of the bullets, and, as a crowning touch, it was asserted that he made love to the miller's wife whilst her husband was fighting the English! That the General could have remained some time in the upper part of a wind-mill without needing the application of a clothes-brush to his uniform would have been very extraordinary, but if he wanted to be out of the way of the enemy's bullets he might have selected a better spot than the top of a wooden structure exposed to the full force of the English fire; for a plan of the battle shows that the French artillery was massed round the mill, and if their shot could reach the English ships, the English guns, which were heavier and better served could have reached the mill.

It is not difficult to show that D'Aiguillon was neither an incapable idiot nor a coward. That he was the lover of Madame du Barry there is no credible authority for

believing, and the story that he owed his appointment as Minister to a trick devised by the King's Mistress seems scarcely to need refutation, although the amusing and tolerably trustworthy writer who mentions the incident speaks of it as "a certain and known fact." According to this account as soon as ever the favourite knew of the fall of Choiseul she sent for the Duc d'Aiguillon, and said to him, "Go at once to the King, and thank him for having made you Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"But," replied the Duc, "I have received no intimation that I have been appointed."

"How stupid men are!" cried Du Barry. "Do as I tell you; at once."

D'Aiguillon did not altogether relish the job, but thought the stake worth the risk, and went straight to the King and began to stammer out his thanks for the honour conferred upon him. The King looked at him half angrily, and half amazed, but said nothing, and D'Aiguillon construing this silence to mean consent, bowed himself out of the Royal presence, and at once took possession of the office which had never been really given to him.¹

The tale appears to us a violation of dramatic unity. Told about Madame de Pompadour and one of her *protégés* it would not have been wildly improbable, but Madame du Barry was a woman of a very different type, and if she had desired the promotion of D'Aiguillon would have trusted to the influence of her charms to win the King's consent to her views. The two chief actors in the little comedy change parts so suddenly that the effect is only absurd. The light-hearted, careless, ex-

¹ CHAMFORT: *Oeuvres choisies*. Paris, 1879.

travagant wanton whose only thought was of her own pleasure, and who, according to her worst enemies, never interfered in politics, is depicted as showing a new and unexpected aptitude for intrigue; whilst the "dark and deep courtier," who had been a prime mover in every cabal which had originated at Versailles during the last few years, belies his relationship to the wily Cardinal by displaying an inability to see through a trick which would have appeared transparent to a school-girl.

Whether D'Aiguillon owed his place to the schemes of Du Barry and the tacit consent of the King, or whether Louis XV had him in mind before he dismissed Choiseul matters very little at the present time. The King cared little or nothing for the *vox populi*, but he was probably very disgusted to find the disgraced Minister exalted to the position of a popular idol. When the Duc de Choiseul left Versailles he was escorted by "a double row of carriages of interminable length," and during the twenty-four hours he was allowed to remain in Paris nearly every person of importance in the city inscribed his name on a register at the Duc's lodgings, despite the fact that the door of the house was guarded by two exempts of police. "They could not have made more of him if he had been a celebrated criminal," said the sarcastic Duc d'Ayen.¹ Songs, epigrams, and bons-mots were made about him, and circular snuff-boxes bearing on one side the effigy of

¹ The witticism was probably invented long afterwards, and ascribed to the Duc d'Ayen as being the most likely person to have made it. De Belleval, indignant at seeing the ex-Minister's door guarded by police, wrote in his *Souvenirs*, "They could not have done more to a great criminal," and from that the sarcasm was most likely manufactured.

the Duc de Choiseul, and on the other that of Sully, were sold in the streets. The beautiful and witty actress, Sophie Arnould, said, on being shown one of these boxes, "Why, they have put the receipts and expenses together." The verses made in honour of the fallen Minister, are not as a rule particularly brilliant, though there is an easy swing about the following epigram:

The Well-Belov'd of the Almanach
Is not the well-belov'd of France.
He does all *ab hoc, ab hac*,
The Well-Belov'd of the Almanach.
All things he puts in his sack
Not only Justice but Finance.
The Well-beloved of the Almanach
Is not the well-beloved of France.

Of considerably more literary merit was the quatrain:

Like every other in his place,
His enemies abound;
But—like no other in disgrace—
Fresh friends he daily found.

Amidst this chorus of praise the Duc de Choiseul retired to Chanteloup. He had never been able to make both ends meet when he was in receipt of an enormous salary, and though in exile he had not many opportunities for spending money, we are not surprised to hear of him, in a year's time or so, petitioning the King for money. He could not have had much hope of success, for, as he knew well, Louis XV, like all the Bourbons, "forgot nothing and forgave nothing," but he did receive a very handsome allowance,—far more than he had ever expected, and he owed it wholly and solely to the good graces of the woman

he had reviled and lampooned, and tried his hardest to drive from the Court—Jeanne du Barry. But, as gratitude, according to the cynical French philosopher, is only “a lively sense of favours to come,” and, as after the King’s death, she was not in a position to confer further benefits upon him, there was nothing to deter this noble and high-minded patriot and statesman from blackening her character still more in the *Memoirs* he compiled during his enforced leisure. To vilify a benefactress, even though she be a harlot, would be repugnant, if not impossible, to most men, but, perhaps, it was his high sense of duty and intense horror of vice which enabled him to achieve the task, and even to display an unctuous satisfaction in the performance of it.

CHAPTER VIII

AN EXAMPLE FROM ENGLISH HISTORY

(1771)

THE fall of Choiseul, though it rather increased the King's troubles, freed Madame du Barry from a relentless foe, and relieved her from the necessity of being always on her guard against his machinations. She was able to devote her time to the improvement of her residence at Louveciennes. Amongst other things we find her investing in the purchase of books. Certainly her bookseller's bill, when compared to her jeweller's, bears the same proportion as the bread did to the sack in Falstaff's score, but the books are well-selected, and not at all the kind of literature which a thoughtless, empty-headed courtesan would be expected to buy. A bookseller's account for twelve hundred livres, now preserved in the Versailles Library, includes a translation of Robertson's History of Charles V, the Memoirs of Brantome, Bassompierre, D'Angoulême and several others; lives of Turenne and Saxe; the travels of Chardin, Kemper, and La Condamine; the "Golden Ass," Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, translations of Bishop Burnet and Sir John Maundeville, and a few plays of her friend and admirer, Cailhava. One looks in vain

for any of the erotic literature which abounded in those days; there is not a single work by Crébillon fils, Abbé Voisenon, or the Chevalier de la Morlière, nor even a copy of the book which the latter dedicated to her. It is evident that if Jeanne du Barry was not an Aspasia she was more than a Lais.

But if Madame du Barry was enjoying a respite from persecution at this time, her Royal lover was engaged in a deadly struggle with the Parliament. Louis XV claimed absolute and despotic sovereignty, and this the Parliament was unwilling to allow him. The mutterings of the coming storm could already be heard, and the King himself was not deaf to them, but, as he said, "things will last out my time." To use his own words, "We hold our crown from God alone. The right to make the laws"—*faire des loix* (*sic*) in the original—"by which our subjects should be led and governed, belongs to us alone, without dependence or division." But the day of despotism was over in France. The republican spirit was becoming more widely spread every day, as the King fully recognized. Fully half a dozen times in his letters he uses the word republic or republican, and more than once deplores the fact that, after his death, the country would be governed by a child, "and what could a child do against all the Republicans with whom I have to contend." He was fully convinced, however, that he was strong enough himself to contend against any Parliament, however republican its tendencies, and having more than his share of the Bourbon obstinacy, he stood in no need of encouragement in supporting his prerogative. Nothing can be more erroneous than to suppose that Louis XV was abetted in his opposition to the Parliament by the evil counsel

of Chancellor de Maupeou, and Madame du Barry. Had he occupied the place of his unfortunate successor when the crisis came, the struggle between King and People would have been short and sharp, though no doubt the result would have been the same. To begin with, he would never have summoned the States General. It is related of him that one evening at his *coucher*, a courtier, "who, on account of his high office was very intimate with the King," said, "You will see, Sire, that this will lead to the necessity of convoking the States General."

The King instantly abandoned his usual calm manner, and seizing the courtier by the arm, said passionately,

"Never repeat those words. I am not bloodthirsty, but if I had a brother who was capable of offering me such advice, I would sacrifice him within twenty-four hours, to the duration of the monarchy and the tranquillity of the kingdom.¹"

Bearing in mind the jealous regard he had for the "right divine of kings to govern wrong," it would have been a work of supererogation on the part of De Maupeou, and contrary to what we know of the character of Madame du Barry, to advise him, and the stories about her—more particularly the celebrated one concerning the portrait of Charles I of England—rest on very slight foundation.

The anecdote is so well-known that it will hardly bear repetition. It figures in every history of the 18th century. Michelet quotes it in his *Histoire de la Révolution*; —Henri Martin in his *Histoire de France*. It is given in every biographical notice of Madame du Barry, and in countless reviews and magazine articles finds a place. We

¹Mémoires de Campan: *Anecdotes sur Louis XV.*

give it here in the words used by a well-known and trustworthy historian.

"The King hesitated to strike the decisive step. The Du Barry succeeded where Maupeou would, no doubt, have failed. Well instructed by the Chancellor, she had placed in her apartment the portrait of Charles I by Van Dyck, and showing it to Louis XV, 'France!' (she gave the King of France the name of a lackey in a comedy) she said, 'Your Parliament will also cut off your head.'¹"

Tracing back the story we find the germ of it in—Pidansat de Mairobert. He does not narrate it dramatically but says that she had the picture placed in her room, and whenever the King appeared to show any inclination towards clemency, or relapsed into his normal condition of good nature (!), she reminded him of the fate of the unfortunate monarch. Pidansat must either have invented the story, or have had some foundation for it. We find the latter in what has been termed "the thirty volumes of scurrilous eaves-dropping" of Bachaumont and his journeymen, where it is recorded under date of March 25, 1771, "The Empress of Russia has carried off the collection of paintings of the Comte de Thiers, who had a number of fine pictures. M. de Marigny saw, to his grief, all these treasures acquired by a foreigner, for want of funds to purchase them for the King. Amongst the pictures was a full-length portrait of Charles I of England, by Van Dyck. That is the only one which remains in France. The Comtesse du Barry, who shows more and

¹ Or, according to another version, "Look, France, what your Parliaments will do to you if you give way to them. They will cut off your head." The quotation is from Henri Martin's *History of France* (1770—1771), p. 283.

more taste for the arts, gave orders to buy it. She paid twenty-four thousand livres, and on being reproached for having chosen this picture from so many others which would have suited her better, asserted that she had recovered a family portrait. In fact the Du Barrys pretend to be related to the house of Stuart."

On October 22, 1771, Bachaumont asserts that Madame du Barry has placed the portrait of Charles I in her room and shows it to the King whenever his hatred of the Parliament is growing cool. Then the writer of the *Nouvelles* adds, with that "underhand malice" which a wholesome dread of the police made it necessary to employ—for the Bastille still loomed large in the horizon of every journalist who aspired to be "spicy"—"One feels certain that a calumny so atrocious and so carefully prepared could not have emanated from the tender and ingenuous heart of Madame du Barry,"—unless her fears for the King were played on by persons whose "policy is as clever as it is infernal." But being fearful lest unsophisticated readers should really fancy that Madame du Barry was incapable of the conduct ascribed to her, he concludes with, "This anecdote, which is proved by events, is attested by courtiers whose evidence has great weight."

We find then that the story rests on no better authority than that of Bachaumont and Pidansat de Mairobert—*arcades ambo*—and even if we are inclined to believe their testimony, one or two difficulties remain. The Baron de Thiers died at Paris, December 15, 1770. The catalogue of his pictures is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale. It is dated 1765, and there is no mention in it of Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I. Perhaps the picture was acquired after 1765, but if so why was no

mention of such an important acquisition written in the catalogue? Presuming, however, that the picture was in his collection, when was the collection sold? Bachaumont's first mention of the picture is dated March 25, 1771, three months after the death of the late proprietor. Scandal and news must be fresh, and it is not very likely that Bachaumont described at the end of March a sale which had taken place at the beginning of January, nor does it seem probable that the collection of Baron de Thiers was dispersed less than a month after the owner's death. But if the picture was not in the possession of Madame du Barry previous to January 20, she could not have used it to point a moral, for on that night the members of the Parliament were arrested and packed off to prison, and the difficulty solved—for the time being. To endeavour to hocus Louis XV into the belief that the Parliament would cut his head off, when he had them safe under lock and key, and could have cut off their heads if he wished, appears a proceeding devoid of the most rudimentary common-sense. That Madame du Barry should have bought a portrait of Charles I because the Du Barrys claimed relationship with the Stuarts appears in some degree feasible, for though she was not a Du Barry except in name, and a Du Barry only in name, she was like nearly every other courtesan, extravagant; that she should have bought the picture for the purpose of inculcating a lesson the King had already learned and applied in a pretty forcible manner, and would have learned without her assistance, is absurd. The absurdity is heightened if we accept the version which makes her say, "This is what the Parliaments will do to you if you give way to them." The comparison was singularly

unhappy, for Charles met his fate because he did *not* accede to the will of the Parliament.

The picture is now in the Louvre. In the official Guide it is (or was) described as having been acquired by Louis XV, but M. J. Guiffrey, the author of a valuable book on Van Dyck, has pointed out that this is an error, as the picture was not bought till the reign of Louis XVI. "It is very doubtful," he adds, "whether the portrait in question ever formed part of the collection of M. de Thiers. Where did Madame du Barry get it? We do not know." On the whole we must entertain a slight doubt as to whether she ever possessed the picture at all, and a very much stronger doubt, almost amounting to a certainty that she never used it, at the instigation of De Maupeou or any one else, as a bugbear to frighten Louis XV. Of literary men, and historians in particular, we have less hope. Anecdotes about Madame du Barry are none too plentiful, and to give up one of the best of them for mere considerations of innate probability, would be asking too much of weak human nature. In future lives of Madame du Barry or histories of the 18th century, the head of Charles I will be as certain to appear as it was in the writings of Mr. Dick.

Chancellor de Maupeou, it will be noticed, plays an important part in this anecdote. It is by his recommendation that Madame du Barry buys the picture, and he employs her as the tool, when bad advice has to be proffered to the King. But he also figures in other stories recounted by the veracious Pidansat de Mairobert. On one occasion, when he was on a visit to Madame du Barry, Zamor, her negro boy, put cock-chafers (*hannetons*) in his wig, while the hostess and guests laughed con-

sumedly at the poor man's efforts to get rid of the insects. Another time, the King, on entering Madame du Barry's room, found her and a dozen friends, playing blind-man's-buff,—the blind man being the Chancellor, who looked so absurd in his wig and *simarre* that the King, who rarely laughed, nearly had a fit.

We are not interested here in defending De Maupeou, though it may be remarked *en passant* that it was—and possibly is, for official traditions die very hard in France—the custom for the Chancellor always to remain at home in case he should be wanted suddenly. D'Aguesseau, the predecessor of De Maupeou, who held the post for many years, was stated to have dined out once only during his tenure of office, and De Maupeou maintained the tradition. His rupture with De Choiseul was said to be due to the fact that the Minister used to send for him, and the Chancellor resented this as an impertinence. But of two things, one. Either the Chancellor was a Machiavellian statesman able to bend the frivolous Du Barry to his will, and compel her to do anything he required; or he was a sycophantic buffoon, willing to play the fool to gain the good will of the King's Mistress, and utterly devoid of all sense of dignity and self-respect. Whichever theory we accept we must ruthlessly reject the other, for they are morally incompatible, and, perhaps, we should do well to believe neither.

De Maupeou was certainly intensely unpopular, and the feeling still exists to some extent; how far it was justified it is not our intention to enquire. The shafts of the satirist spared Madame du Barry after the fall of Choiseul, but lampoons and pasquinades were freely showered on De Maupeou and the King.

In the latter case they were often pasquinades in the true sense of the word, for the papers were affixed to his statue. One of these excited "general horror," for it was a thinly-veiled incitement to murder. A placard was affixed to the King's statue, bearing the words, "By order of the Mint, a Louis struck badly is to be re-struck,"—an allusion to the occasion when Damiens "wounded Royalty slightly under the fifth rib." There is too a parody on the Lord's Prayer, which need not be quoted, having no literary merit to redeem its profanity.

As for De Maupeou, it is to be hoped he was not thin-skinned, or passages like this would have hurt him very much. It was evidently penned by a "good hater."

"Maupeou is the most abominable monster that hell has ever vomited forth to distress the kingdom, the most damnable hypocrite, the most determined villain, that has ever been seen on earth. The Jacques Clements, Ravail-lacs and Damiens, may yield him the first place in their murderous gang. The Sicilian Vespers, Saint Bartholomews, the defeats of Fontenoy, Poitiers, Azincourt and Malplaquet, were lucky days for the nation in comparison with that on which this traitor was born, for they only destroyed some Frenchmen, whereas this impious wretch would wipe out the very name of the nation. What good citizen, if any such are still left us, would not desire the honour to forge, load, and fire the weapon which should revenge the nation, and deliver it for ever from the scoundrel who has ruined it."

The passage is taken from a pamphlet, not named, quoted in *Les Fastes de Louis XV.*

The new Parliament which met April 13, 1771, proved tolerably obsequious to the King's desires, and therefore the story about Charles I must have been anterior to that date. At the "Bed of Justice," held at Versailles when the Parliament met, the King said, "You have heard my wishes: I now order you to conform to them, and begin your functions on Monday. I forbid all discussions contrary to my edicts * * * I shall never alter."

"Monsieur le duc,"—Bachaumont and his worthy follower, Pidansat de Mairobert, report Madame du Barry to have said to the Duc de Nivernais,—“it is to be hoped that you will cease opposing the King's wishes, for, as you heard him say, he will never alter.”

"True, madam," replied the Duc gallantly, "but he was looking at you when he spoke."

Having whittled down the independence of the Parliament to the vanishing point, and declared that from this resolve he would never alter, it was not needful for Du Barry to lend her aid to strengthen him in his determination. Indeed, we do not know for certain that she opposed the Parliament. We could wish for some better authority than Bachaumont, but we are bound to confess that the story about the Duc de Nivernais is *ben trovato*. She was, with the possible exception of his daughters, the only person in France who cared for that battered old hulk of selfishness and vice, Louis XV, and who would have supported him, right or wrong.

The knowledge of the affection she had for the King, caused the Parliamentary party to try to wound her in a tender spot, by circulating the report that the King was getting tired of her, and was seeking a new mistress. Hardy, who only re-echoed public rumour, states under

date of Feb. 8, 1771, that he hears "they are trying to supplant her (Du Barry) by another mistress, who bears the name of Julia Smith, and who is said to be young and otherwise beautiful. There is also some talk about the Princesse de Monaco, Madame de Valentinois, and a third who is not named."

One would like to know something about Miss Julia Smith, but curiosity has to go unsatisfied. The Princesse de Monaco was a very pretty but very dissipated young woman, whose character could be best described by a short Anglo-Saxon word not usually printed. She lived at Versailles and refused to rejoin her husband at Monaco, but he was kept informed of her "goings on," and found a solace in erecting gibbets all round his Principality, and hanging thereon the effigies of his wife's lovers. The Principality was small (though larger then than it is now) and the number of courtiers who enjoyed the favours of the Prince's flighty spouse was very great, so that, finally, the gibbets formed a continuous line all along the frontier.

Not one of these four ladies succeeded, however, in supplanting Madame du Barry, who remained secure of the King's affection. A very remarkable proof of the consideration in which she was held is shown by the register of Notre Dame, under date of Feb. 24, 1771, when the infant son of Claude Gerard, one of the Royal servants, was baptised, the sponsors being the "Very powerful and most excellent Prince Louis, King of France and Navarre"—represented by the Duc de Duras, the First Gentleman of the Bed Chamber—and the "high and powerful Lady, Benedicte, Comtesse du Barry." Louis XV had a marked respect for all religious forms, and it is strange to find

him associated, even by proxy, with his Mistress as sponsor at a baptism. He could not be blamed if he did not stand godfather very often, for the ceremony was expensive. On this occasion he had to pay for thirty-four dozen and six boxes of *dragées* at four francs each, making a total of sixteen hundred and fifty-six francs, and then may be considered to have got off cheaply, for sometimes, when he was sponsor, his bill for sugar plums amounted to three thousand francs. It will be noticed that Jeanne du Barry is here called Benedicte. She was always lavish in the use of names, and she seems to have reserved this cognomen especially for public deeds, but why she adopted the name we know not.

This same month, the Crown Prince of Sweden (afterwards Gustavus III), who was on a visit to Paris, and thought it possible that he might one day stand in need of the good offices of Madame du Barry, presented her with a handsome collar for her little dog. Rumour says that the collar was made of diamonds, but that may be an exaggeration. He also sent her every year, for the next few years at least, a handsome box filled with Swedish gloves.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCARLET WOMAN AND THE SCARLET ROBES

UNDER the date May 7, 1771, Pidansat de Mairobert tells a story about Madame du Barry and a Jew, a story which has the rare merit of being likely to have occurred. A Jew, who was one of the many jewellers with whom Madame du Barry had dealings, found a difficulty in obtaining his money from the Favourite. He therefore prepared a small and tasteful piece of jewellery, and called upon Madame du Barry early one morning. He found her in bed, for ladies at that time often used to transact business in bed, or even whilst in their bath. As he expected, she took a fancy to the article, and told him to draw out an order on M. Beaujon, the Court Banker, and she would sign it. She signed the order without looking at it, but when M. Beaujon met her, a day or two later, he reproached her for her extravagance. She retorted that he was making a great fuss about a trifling sum, to which he replied that he did not consider sixty-six thousand francs a trifling sum. It was found that the astute Hebrew had made out the order for the full amount of his account. The light-hearted Mistress laughed heartily at the trick that had been played upon her, and told the King, who was also much amused.

A page or two later Pidansat de Mairobert recounts one of the "celebrated" anecdotes of Madame du Barry,—a story which has been copied into the works of dozens of grave historians, and has been often depicted on canvas. We will, as usual, give the tale in Pidansat's own words, and then examine it critically.

"Soon after,"—presumably soon after May 7, 1771, the date of the story about the Jew,—“an anecdote was spread abroad which shows how easy it was for her to bewitch and enchant her august lover, for, to do that she had only to give way to the many follies which passed through her head. This natural ease, freedom, or, to speak more properly, neglect of all modesty, never failed of its effect. The story concerns two of the most grave and sedate personages of the Court,—the Nuncio, and Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon. The King was in her bed-chamber, and the Countess was in bed, where it was her custom to remain all the morning. The two prelates were paying their court to the King, and the Favourite. At this moment M. Pot d'Auteuil arrived to bring her a contract to sign. She made some difficulty about allowing this officer of justice to enter her room whilst the King was there, but the Monarch insisted on his coming in, and she sprang from the bed in much the same costume as Venus rising from the sea, and made each of the prelates put on one of her shoes whilst they, as a reward, enjoyed the ravishing spectacle of her hidden charms!

"The notary left as soon as his business was finished, and, before he had recovered from his surprise, recounted the adventure, which, he added, had extremely amused His Majesty. We may be sure that the Marquise de Pompadour, and all the other mistresses before her, would

have never dared to play such a prank, and it is this recklessness, which, as we have observed, renders the society of this petulant beauty so delightful to the King.¹"

The details are recounted with so much circumstantiality, and the supposed eye-witness of the incident—the family notary of Madame du Barry—is a person of such respectability and credibility, that it is not to be wondered at that historians of the old school, who accepted their data without examination, when princes and statesmen were not concerned, inserted the story in their books. But a very slight analysis will reveal so many discrepancies, errors, and absurdities, that the story, like so many more of the *Anecdotes*, must be relegated to the limbo of found-out-lies.

M. Vatel, whose statements may usually be received as correct, asserts that, from 1767 to 1774, there was no Papal Nuncio at the Court of France, and that Abbé Sozzifanti acted as *chargé d'affaires* during those years, and it is very doubtful whether the Abbé's position entitled him to the entrée to the King's private apartments. De la Roche-Aymon, Archbishop of Rheims, Grand Almoner to the King, and *doyen* of the Bishops of France, would certainly have had the right to enter the King's apartment, but in 1771 he was 79 years old, and very infirm. The moral, or immoral delight he would have derived from gazing at the fully revealed charms of Du Barry, would not have compensated him for the physical difficulty he would have had in kneeling down to put on her slipper. Moreover, he was not made a Cardinal till June, 1772, or fully a year after

¹ *Anecdotes sur Madame la Comtesse du Barri*, vol. 2, pp. 24 and 25 (edition 1776).

the date of the supposed incident. He lived to place the Crown upon the head of Louis XVI, and it seems more than doubtful whether that fastidiously virtuous Prince would have cared to be crowned by an ecclesiastic who had truckled so obsequiously to the Mistress of the late King.

We now come to the person who witnessed the incident and recounted it. The *Sieur* Pot d'Auteuil must have been a very extraordinary professional man, and have conducted his business on very peculiar principles. An objection to write business letters to a rich client has never yet been generally noticed amongst members of the legal profession, but this notary, instead of writing to make an appointment for a certain hour on a certain day, starts off from Paris for Versailles, Marly, or Fontainebleau (as we do not know the exact date we are not sure where the Court was) on the off-chance of finding his client at home. We are not told whether Madame du Barry was in the King's chamber, or whether he was in her room, but presumably the former, for surely the two venerable ecclesiastics would not have gone to the bed-chamber of the Royal concubine to consult the King on a matter of business. However valuable M. Pot d'Auteuil's time may have been he would hardly have dared to hunt up his client in the King's private apartments, nor, if he had gone to her apartments, would a notary have suffered himself to be announced when he learned that the King was there and was conferring with the two highest dignitaries of the Church.

Like every other professional man, he had no doubt often seen strange sights, and though he had never before beheld such a spectacle as the Pope's Legate and an aged

Archbishop engaged in placing satin *mules* on the dainty, little feet of a beautiful courtesan, the experience was not so remarkable as to make him forget long acquired habits of secrecy. It was the barber, not the confidential adviser of King Midas, who was obliged to rush out and whisper to the growing corn that his master had asses' ears.

Taking up the next point we are led to consider what was the document to which it was so important that Madame du Barry should affix her signature without delay. She could not have wanted to borrow money, for all her drafts were honoured—though not without some grumbling—by Beaujon, the Court banker, nor did she lend. The only house she had was not hers to sell, for it was State property, and she did not buy another house till the close of the following year, some eighteen months later. But Notary Pot d'Auteuil, though unbusinesslike in some respects, kept a careful record of all his transactions. His books are still extant and have been searched with great care by M. Ch. Vatel, the biographer of Madame du Barry. No record of any transaction in which she was concerned is recorded between September 1, 1768, the date of her marriage contract, and December 7, 1772, when she bought the Hotel Binet, at Versailles.

There are two other characters in the little comedy whose conduct requires an instant's notice,—the King and Madame du Barry. Louis XV always showed a superstitious reverence for sacred things and veneration for ecclesiastics, and hated all unseemly conduct, in public at least. Madame du Barry also, according to a chronicler none too well disposed towards her—Senac de Meilhan—was always decent in her behaviour, and reserved.

Summing up the details of the story we find then, that

a notary who requires Madame du Barry's signature to a deed, of which he preserved no record, called upon her unexpectedly, and tried to force his way into her presence though he was informed that the King was with her, and was engaged on business with two dignitaries of the Church. Madame du Barry refused to see him, but the King insisted on his being admitted. He entered, and the King's Mistress sprang out of bed in the scantiest of garbs, whilst the two prelates, one almost an octogenarian, knelt at her foot to put on her shoes. M. Pot d'Auteuil was so shocked or surprised, that, although in his business capacity he was the repository of family secrets of all sorts, he could not help blurting out the particulars of the scene he had witnessed, to the first persons he met.

These numerous and important discrepancies have not prevented the story being used by many writers, especially during the Revolution, and with such additions as they thought necessary. Camille Desmoulins quoted it, and in the *Annales Patriotiques* there was a version, far too indecent to be printed here. It is the foundation of a coarse and abominable lie, told by Soulavie the elder, not about Madame du Barry but—Marie Antoinette.¹ For such writers it was well adapted as exemplifying the cynical indifference of the King, the immodesty of the favourite, and the time-serving servility and want of dignity of the clergy, or as Camille Desmoulins puts it, "showing what sort of wood the bishops were made of." Honest Republicans were expected to be shocked at such depravity, but many middle-aged tradesmen must

¹ *Mémoires historiques du règne de Louis XVI*, par Jean Louis Soulavie (l'aîné), vol. VI. pp. 8 and 9. Paris, an X (1800).

have been able to remember the days when Court ladies gave orders to tradesmen and servants, or listened to odes or music, not only whilst dressing, but whilst in bed, or even sometimes, it is said, in their bath. In the latter case the beauty effectually concealed all her charms, however, by wearing a *peignoir*, and a covering was also spread over the top of the bath. A story is told of the painter Doyen "interviewing" Madame du Barry in her bath. She happened to mention that about a year previously she had been so alarmed by a terrible peal of thunder, whilst she was in her bath, that she jumped out, and ran as she was into another room. The artist rose, walked to the window, and opened it.

"What are you doing, Doyen?" cried Madame du Barry.

"Madame la Comtesse," he replied gravely, "I was looking out in the hope of seeing a storm-cloud. It would be such a good chance for a painter."

CHAPTER X

*"Base ingratitude crams, and blasphemes his
feeder"*

(1771)

THAT Madame du Barry should escape the notice of the blackmailers was not to be expected. Little was known of her career, but what was known was not to her credit, and the ignorance of the public about her early life made it easier for the scoundrels who wished to draw money out of her to exercise their invention without the fear of detection.

The satirists in the pay of the Duc de Choiseul had shot some hundreds of poisoned darts at her, but their productions were ephemeral; each lampoon lived only a few hours or a few days, and then died, or was driven out of the public mind by some fresher and livelier squib. But a book is a very different affair: it can be put on a shelf, and perused and re-perused whenever the owner likes. Considering that Madame du Barry had a past life that would not bear investigation, it is rather strange that she should have occupied the position of mistress to the King for two years before she began to receive the attention of the literary blackmailers. It was not till July, 1771, that Thevenot de Morande brought

out the *Gazetier Cuirassé*, which professed to be "scandal about the Court of France," and contained a good deal about Madame du Barry, mixed with ill-natured tattle about many other people of consequence. Thevenot de Morande well knew that

"A lie that is all a lie may be fought with and killed outright,
But a lie that is half the truth is a harder matter to fight;"

and spiced his narrative with distorted facts, derived from a "lady of Courcelles," and cleverly altered so as to give most pain, so that Madame du Barry, when she heard that he had a second book, more specially devoted to her, implored her Royal lover to take steps to prevent the publication. The story of how Beaumarchais was employed on this embassy, and how well he succeeded, has already been told in the introduction.

Pidansat de Mairobert was, morally, not a bit better than Thevenot de Morande, but as he lived in France and held some sort of official position, he could not bring out his collection of scandal until after the King's death, when Madame du Barry was in exile, and no longer in a position to buy him off. He therefore hated Thevenot de Morande,—or, as he, no doubt purposely, calls him "Maraud" (scoundrel)—with all the intensity that the unsuccessful rogue feels for the successful one. He cannot too strongly condemn Thevenot, but he carefully quotes all the worst passages from his rival's book, not for the purpose of examining or contradicting them, but on the ground that Thevenot's book being a failure, it has become so rare (in four years) that readers have no chance to see it. They were both experienced masters in the ignoble

art of mud-flinging;—some of their filth has clung to the memory of their victim for a hundred and twenty years, and in all human probability will never be entirely washed away.

Madame du Barry appears to have made no attempt to buy the MS. of the *Gazetier Cuirassé*. Perhaps Thevenot never intended to let her have the opportunity, in order that he might get a better price when he attacked her again; or perhaps she felt more secure of the King's affection in 1771 than she did at the close of 1773. There is the evidence of Comte Mercy d'Argenteau to prove, however, that at this time (1771) no change had occurred in the King's regard. There had been the usual never ending squabble about the behaviour of the Dauphiness towards the Mistress, and the young Princess had continued in her usual, and proper, course of conduct, despite the lectures and advice of her worldly-wise mother, and the Ambassador, though Maria Theresa recommended her daughter to look upon the Du Barry as the same as any other lady admitted to the Court, and Mercy d'Argenteau never lost an opportunity of "improving the occasion." In a letter to the Empress he states that he had had an interview with the King's Mistress, who hoped that the Dauphiness would not "regard her with an eye of aversion." She (Madame du Barry) had begged the King to permit her to be absent whenever Mesdames ¹ were present, and that the King not having replied to the proposal when it was made verbally, she had repeated it in writing, and received a very satisfactory reply. "I thought instantly," says Comte Mercy, "that for many reasons it would be

¹ Madame du Barry believed that the King's daughters encouraged the Dauphiness to snub her.

very advisable to see this reply, and in order to do so, I feigned not to quite understand what the favourite had told me. I made some objections, and induced her at last, though with some trouble, to show me the letter which I read through. It was carelessly written, both as regards the form and the matter, and began as follows, 'You are wrong to believe that I love you any the less because I did not reply in the first instance. I always love you greatly, and love you the same.' The King went on to say that, if he ordered that the favourite should be better treated, he would be obeyed, but with a bad grace, and that he attributed the antipathy of Mesdames to the Comtesse du Barry to their principles of devotion, and scruples; that the late Queen, though very pious, would never have conducted herself thus; and that he, being heartily sick and tired of it all, proposed to exclude them (Mesdames) from all future *petits voyages* and only invite the Dauphiness and the Comtesse de Provence."

From all which Comte Mercy concludes that Madame du Barry is a person whose acquaintance should be cultivated.

"Stout Choiseul," when in office, "looked upon her only as a wonderfully bedizened Scarlet Woman, and went on his way as though she were not," but he had now been in exile nearly a year, and began to feel the everlasting want of pence which had vexed him as a public man even when he had an income of fully three fourths of a million of francs a year. At Chanteloup he kept good cheer and gave magnificent banquets to his many sympathizers, hunted twice a week, held sumptuous receptions, and had private theatricals. His house was open to any man of letters who chose to ingratiate himself with his

host by speaking or writing against Madame du Barry.¹

Some good-natured friend no doubt reported this to the King, who retaliated by depriving the Duc de Choiseul of the colonelcy of the Swiss Guard, a post worth a hundred thousand francs a year. This so reduced the ex-Minister's finances that he was obliged to ask the King for aid, but his old pride and haughtiness were not abated by his fall, and his epistle to Louis XV is more like the demand of a foot-pad, than the ordinary begging letter. The requests, or rather the stipulations, are not distinguished by modesty. He requires: (1) liberty to visit any part of France, the Court and Paris excepted; (2) an important military command; (3) settlement of all the debts he had contracted whilst in office, including three or four millions of francs he had borrowed from his wife and another couple of millions due to other creditors; (4) a revenue of forty thousand francs on the forest of Hagenau, and forest rights amounting to about eight hundred thousand francs; (5) an annuity of fifty thousand francs with reversion to his wife if he should die first. He thought also of adding a protest concerning his deprivation of the office of colonel of the Swiss Guards, on the ground that the office was permanent, but from this his friends dissuaded him.

This letter was entrusted to one of his friends, the Duc du Châtelet, who was as haughty, cold, and proud as himself, with orders to deliver it into the King's hands, and particularly to avoid all intercourse with either the Mistress or the Ministers, for "any interest they might

¹ The description is taken from the Memoirs of the Prince de Ligne and the MS. Memoirs of M. Dufort de Cheverny,—a warm partisan of de Choiseul, who visited Chanteloup several times whilst the Minister was in disgrace.

show in my affairs, or benefits they might confer would be humiliating to me.¹"

Perhaps the Duc du Châtelet received verbal instructions which cancelled the others, for though as a Duc, and Colonel of the King's regiment of Infantry, he might have obtained an interview with the King without much trouble, he went straight to the Duc d'Aiguillon, unfolded the nature of his embassy, and told the Minister that he wished to deal direct with the King. He informed Choiseul of the steps he had taken, and the ex-Minister does not appear to have objected, and probably did not care, so long as he obtained the money somehow, by what means it had been procured. As a stroke of diplomacy, the step taken by the Duc du Châtelet was ill-advised, for D'Aiguillon was surprised and annoyed, and the King naturally refused to treat the matter except through his Minister. Finding that he was likely to do more harm than good to his cause by discussing the matter any further with the Duc d'Aiguillon—who finally began to lose his temper—the Duc du Châtelet resolved, on leaving his presence, to go straight to Madame du Barry, and interest her on behalf of his friend before D'Aiguillon could interfere to prejudice her. He obtained an interview with her and sent a long account of all that she said to the Duc de Choiseul. This letter affords a most striking testimony to her amiability, generosity, good sense, and forgiving disposition, for it must be remembered that the person for whom her intercession was asked was her bitterest foe, who still had all the will, though not the

¹ *Mémoires de M. de Choiseul écrits par lui-même et imprimés sous ses yeux, dans son cabinet de Chanteloup et à Paris* (1790). Vol. 2, p. 4.

power to insult and annoy her, and who was certain to be the reverse of grateful to her, even though she risked much to serve him. So suspicious and distrustful was Louis XV, that if Madame du Barry had advocated too warmly the cause of the Duc de Choiseul, she might have involved herself in his ruin,—especially if the King had chanced to notice, about the same time, some fresh young face which took his fancy.

The letter of the Duc du Châtelet to the Duc de Choiseul is of great length, but the portrait it gives of Madame du Barry—though drawn by an unwilling hand, and not calculated to please the recipient—is so flattering, that any book which purports to give a life of Jeanne du Barry would be incomplete if it did not give extracts from this epistle, and show the better side of the character of a woman, who, if she led a “life of vice” had at least some compensating good qualities, and foremost among them the virtue which “never faileth”—Charity.

After explaining the object of his embassy, Du Châtelet begged her to procure for him the favour of an interview with the King—for Louis XV had peremptorily refused to see him as soon as he knew the nature of his business—which “she promised with the best grace in the world.” He goes on to say,

“I even offered to read her the copy of your letter,—in an excess of confidence for which you may scold me, but which I thought due to the frank and open manner in which she spoke of the old quarrel between you and her, and the wish she had to be on good terms with you. She declined the proposal, but I discussed with her all your demands, and recited your letter almost word for

word, for, as you may well imagine I have had the time to learn it by heart. I began by claiming that your appointment was irrevocable, and that you owed it to yourself to make this observation to the King.¹

"She agreed, but passed over this article quickly, though I perceived she was perfectly well-informed on the subject as she repeated the same arguments which M. d'Aiguillon had used about the *brevet*. As to the forest of Hagueneau I explained the matter, and she appeared to well understand it. She raised no objection either as to the pension to Madame de Choiseul, which I explained in the most fit and proper manner, adding that the Duchesse knew nothing of the step you had taken, and which your sense of probity had dictated to you, and it was even very uncertain that she would accept the pension. From which I conclude, that if the King deigns to interest himself in your situation, and grant you a sum of money to meet your most pressing debts, you might increase that sum and drop the question of the pension.

"She cried out a good deal, but without showing temper, when I spoke of ready money, because there is not a crown in the Treasury. To which I replied that the difficulty would not be so great, if the King was willing—as the colonelcy of the Swiss was worth more than a hundred thousand livres nett—to make a deduction from the salary of the new colonel. She replied that this plan could not

¹ Alluding to the Colonelcy of the Swiss Guards. Though not included in the letter Du Châtelet appears to have had instructions to mention the point, and had done so to D'Aiguillon, who remarked that the words "during our good pleasure" occurred in the *brevet*, to which Du Châtelet replied that was "a mere form of words" not affecting the rights of the question.

be adopted, because no deductions could be made from the pay of the person to whom the King intended to give the command of the Swiss. You will conclude, if you think as I do, that it is intended for the Comte d'Artois or else the Comte de la Marche.

"I ought to have commenced by telling you, but writing so hastily I do not remember the order of events, that the first subject treated of was your liberty. She told me that it would be imprudent to speak of that at the present moment, but a more favourable opportunity would surely come, and perhaps soon. I replied, however, that that was a point on which you strongly insisted." (Here follow three pages of reasons.)

"I was satisfied with her replies; she told me that she bore you no ill-will, and was glad of an opportunity to show that such was the case; that all that had happened had been your fault, and she had in the beginning done all she could to prevent it; that you must feel that matters could not again be on the same footing as they once were,—not as regarded herself, for she was a mere nobody, but in regard to the King, whom you continually offended by aiming at the object of his affections.

"I suppress many of the minor details which have nothing to do with the present, or even any future, subject, but neither in tone or manner did she show any resentment. I recapitulated at the end of the conversation all that I had said in the course of it, and grew as warm on the subject as I possibly could. If enthusiasm for goodness and virtue is communicative, I might flatter myself that I inspired it. But, however that may be, I have every reason to be as satisfied with the end as with the beginning of my interview, and Madame du Barry promised to give

an account, at once, to the King of the object of our interview, and to ask permission for me to hand him your letter."

If Madame du Barry were the coarse, vulgar, ignorant, and giddy courtesan she is generally depicted, it must be confessed that in this interview she displayed consummate ability in concealing those defects. The Duc du Châtelet was not by any means a first-rate diplomatist, and perhaps it required no more than a woman's ordinary wit to answer his very shallow arguments. Her replies are marked by good sense and modesty, and her frankness and candour disarmed an enemy who would have been glad of an opportunity to report any signs of vanity, frivolity, or stupidity. To a quick perception to detect the weak points in a case that would never have been strong, even in better hands, is united a considerate regard for the difficulties of the ambassador, with just a touch of self-respect to show that though she was unmindful of herself, she was carefully jealous that the King should not be wounded through her. If she had been playing a part, and affected a sympathy she did not feel, we might admire her cleverness, though we should have no reason to respect her, but, as will be seen, she gave the practical aid of her great influence to Choiseul, and the unlooked-for success which his application received was entirely due to her efforts. When it is remembered that she undertook this task for a man who had never lost a chance of trying to drive her from the Court, who had searched everywhere for pretty women whom he hoped would be able to supplant her; who had subsidized wits to lampoon her, and hired detectives to search out the details of her past life; who, in public, treated her with as much scorn and contumely as he

dared to show, and, in private, always alluded to her as "*cette catin*,"—her action becomes almost noble. Many estimable women calling themselves good Christians, who—proud in the possession of a chastity which has never been tempted—shudder at the name of Jeanne du Barry, would find it impossible to show quite such a forgiving spirit.

In subsequent letters the Duc du Châtelet states, even more explicitly, that Madame du Barry assisted him in his difficult task. On December 13, he writes to M. de Choiseul that at Trianon he had spoken to the King, but Louis XV had avoided all mention of Choiseul, and etiquette forbade Du Châtelet to start the subject. He, thereupon, went to Madame du Barry, stated that he was in despair, his honour was compromised, and he thought himself of sufficient importance to be able to deliver a letter to the King. Madame du Barry was "touched," and even "frightened." She told him the King did not wish to appear in person in the negotiations; that she was sincere; that M. d'Aiguillon had no animosity against Choiseul, and she had still less, but the King was displeased with the ardour shown by many of the ex-Minister's friends; and finally she promised to see the King and D'Aiguillon, and let Du Châtelet know the result.

Before leaving, the Duc repeated all the provisos of Choiseul's letter, but came down in the matter of the "compensation" to two millions. He insisted, however, that the exiled Minister should have the privilege of visiting any part of France, except Paris and the Court.

"She replied," he writes, "that as for liberty, that must not be dreamed of, but it would come, if led up to quietly. That as to the money arrangement, she knew nothing about finance, but would speak to M. d'Aiguillon, and tell him

it must end in the manner I proposed, that is to say that somehow or other you should have a hundred thousand livres annually for life. I added that I was filled with gratitude at her kindness, which I took for myself and not for you, and that I should glory in making known publicly my gratitude. She listened to me, understood perfectly, and even appeared touched at my position. She concluded by assuring me that M. d'Aiguillon had no power over her; she heard everyone who came to her, and did as she liked. She promised to tell me the following day how she had succeeded."

Madame du Barry did not conquer the King's aversion to Choiseul without some difficulty. "She was shut up with him from six till half past eight," says Du Châtelet. "So long an interview augured well for me, and I flattered myself somewhat on my success." On the morrow Du Châtelet went to Paris, and purposely avoided a meeting with D'Aiguillon who sent a courier to him. After a Cabinet Council had been held, and the Choiseul claims considered, Du Châtelet came back from Paris, expecting a refusal, he says, and prepared to quarrel with D'Aiguillon in consequence. He visited Madame du Barry, who told him that D'Aiguillon was very angry with her for the part she had taken, and she very sensibly remarked that she was under no obligation to assist Choiseul, and the most that could be expected of her was to show no animosity towards him. All that she had done, and would do, would be for Du Châtelet alone. On the previous evening she had had a long interview with the King, who was very angry with her.

A second council was held, at which the King was reported "to have been very short and sharp with M.

d'Aiguillon, and Madame du Barry left in a very bad temper,"—of which Du Châtelet flattered himself he was the cause. As soon as D'Aiguillon arrived home, Du Châtelet called upon him and was shown the subjoined letter from the King.

"My Cousin, You need not trouble to send me the letter of M. de Choiseul which M. du Châtelet has handed you. I have already made known to you my intentions, and shall not change them. M. de Praslin was in a different position from M. de Choiseul, and, moreover, was very ill. He is very lucky in only being sent to Chanteloup, but I will not permit him to leave there. I consent, however, out of kindness, to grant him two hundred thousand livres gratification, with reversion to Madame de Choiseul in case she should survive him. That is my decision: let us drop the subject and not speak of it again."

In the meantime, however, M. de Choiseul, learning that the command of the Swiss Guards was intended for a member of the Royal Family, sent in an unconditional resignation of the post,—the first wise step he had taken, and one which did him much good with the King, and so delighted poor Du Châtelet that he twice kissed the courier who brought him the news. By this sudden change of position from a claimant to a petitioner, Choiseul forced the King's hand, and threw himself on the royal generosity, though he nearly undid the good he had effected, says Besenval,¹ "by sending through the post a letter intended to come under the King's eyes, and likely to exasperate him." M. du Châtelet thought that all was lost. In his

¹ The Choiseul and Du Châtelet correspondence ends at this point, but the subsequent history of the transaction is to be found in Besenval's *Memoirs*, vol. ii. pp. 48, to 50.

despair he addressed himself again to Madame du Barry in the salon at Choisy. She turned toward M. d'Aiguillon, and said in a loud voice, "It must be like that." Then ensued a lively conversation between the King and M. d'Aiguillon, and the King said, as he sat down to the gaming table, "Sixty thousand livres pension, and a hundred thousand crowns in ready money." Shortly afterwards M. d'Aiguillon informed M. du Châtelet of the decision, adding that of the sixty thousand livres, fifty thousand were reversible to Madame de Choiseul. M. du Châtelet was much relieved at hearing this news which he had not expected at all. He sought, and found, an opportunity to thank Madame du Barry. She told him that after the manner in which M. de Choiseul had given in his resignation, the King had determined of his own accord to grant this augmentation.

The long and unpleasant task of M. du Châtelet—who had made himself quite ill worrying about his friend's affairs—was thus brought to a satisfactory conclusion. It is to be hoped he was thanked for his pains—no one else was. The Duc de Choiseul received a sum in ready money which was equal, in modern currency, to about £40,000, with an annuity of some £7,000, of which £6,000 was to be continued to his wife if she should survive him. In the "Memoirs Written by Himself" he says, "This indemnity was more than I had asked, and much more than I had hoped for," but the manner in which he received this not despicable benefit does not fill us with admiration for his character. He writes, "Neither I nor Madame de Choiseul returned any thanks. The injustice, and above all the unfeeling manner which had been used, relieved us from the necessity of

expressing any gratitude. I only began from this moment to be really the personal enemy of M. d'Aiguillon, and the conduct of the King in regard to me put the finishing touch to the opinion that I had of him, and the disgust with which his feebleness and cruelty inspired me."

As no thanks were to be rendered to either the King or D'Aiguillon for this very substantial fortune, it is obvious that the person to whom the Duc de Choiseul thought he was indebted for his success was Madame du Barry. Du Châtelet acknowledged that if he had won the game it had been by the help of the King's Mistress. She had, indeed, told Du Châtelet that all she did was for him alone, for she had no reason to render favours to her old foe, but it was Choiseul who benefited by her action, and no sooner had he swept the stakes into his pocket than he ignored the fact that he had held a bad hand and played it badly, but had been able to win the game through his partner's aid. *Passato il pericolo, gabbato il santo*; Choiseul improved on the Italian proverb, and when once the danger was passed he not only forgot to thank the Saint, but threw filth at his image.

Of course if this high-minded and virtuous nobleman had refused to accept a fortune because it came from the hand of a prostitute, we should respect his severe moral principles; but he did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he cashed the Treasury order for three hundred thousand francs with a celerity which was very remarkable considering the defective postal arrangements of the time, for, on December 13, Du Châtelet so despaired of success that Madame du Barry "was touched and frightened at his condition," and on December 22, a "cheque" for three hundred thousand francs, payable to "M. de

Choiseul or bearer," was cashed. Having accepted from this sullied source a sum, which was equal (if we calculate the purchase value of the annuity in money of to-day) to about £200,000, any man possessed of common decency would have thanked the person or persons to whom he owed his fortune, but if wounded pride forbade him to do that, would, at least have refrained from reviling his benefactors.

No thanks, Choiseul thought, were due to the King and D'Aiguillon, because of the "ungracious manner" in which the favour had been accorded. Thanks were, perhaps, due to Madame du Barry, but a strictly virtuous nobleman could not be expected to evince any gratitude to a woman who was no better than she should be. But the aggressively blatant virtue of Choiseul went farther than this. In his book of *Memoirs*—every sheet of paper for which was paid for with money she had procured for him—this despicable titled cad alludes to her, more than once, as a "*catin*," which she certainly was, but which it ill became him to call her. As M. Vatel, the French biographer of Madame du Barry, very neatly observes, "He (Choiseul) was as deficient in dignity as he was in gratitude, and succeeded in proving that there is a creature infinitely more loathsome than a courtesan, and that is a courtier."

But as Madame du Barry knew Choiseul's character, and that he would be sure to bite the hand that fed him, his conduct only throws into greater relief the kindliness and unselfishness of her character. Even Pidansat de Mairobert shows a gleam of the good feeling which was utterly wanting to Choiseul, and not only speaks of the generosity of Madame du Barry, but

even prints about it some verses which are so atrociously bad that one is tempted to believe he wrote them himself.

Jeanne du Barry had found her enemy hungry, and given him bread to eat; thirsty, and had given him water to drink, but the promise which Solomon and St. Paul hold out was not fulfilled in her case. A triple armour of pride, self-conceit, and ingratitude, protected that pachydermatous prig, Choiseul, from the coals of fire heaped upon his head; and as Du Barry was notoriously unchaste, it would, of course, be something worse than profanity to even hope that she had her reward.

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE BLACK BOY

(1772)

No very important events in the life of Madame du Barry marked the year 1772. On New Year's Day there was a happy omen for the Favourite, for the Dauphiness broke through her usual reserve and addressed a few words to Du Barry, who was highly delighted at this act of condescension. She must have been thankful for very small mercies, if we accept the version of Comte d'Argenteau, who was likely to make the most of the incident.

On January 1, it was the custom for the courtiers to visit in turn all the members of the Royal Family, and exchange a few words of greeting. Madame du Barry, of course, had to pay a visit to the Dauphin and Dauphiness, and Comte Mercy d'Argenteau was greatly troubled in his mind as to the way the Princess would behave, and exercised a great deal of care to keep her out of the way of her Aunts until the ceremony was over. The day arrived and the Comtesse du Barry came, accompanied by the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and the Maréchale de Mirepoix. The Dauphiness first addressed the Duchesse,—which no doubt was according to etiquette,—“then turning

without embarrassment or affectation to the Comtesse, she said, 'There are a great number of people at Versailles.' After which Her Royal Highness next spoke to the Maréchale de Mirepoix." Marie Antoinette did not perform her task with a very good grace, for when she saw the Ambassador later in the day, she said to him, "I have followed your advice. Here is the Dauphin who will bear witness as to my behaviour." The Prince smiled but said nothing. Then the Archduchess related all that had happened, and finished by saying, "I have spoken once, but I am firmly resolved to stop at that, and that woman shall never hear the sound of my voice again."

Even as it was, her Aunts made her almost repent that she had spoken at all. On the other hand the Comte de Provence, afterwards Louis XVIII, who wanted the command of the Swiss Guards, paid assiduous court to Madame du Barry, and persuaded his wife to dismiss one of her ladies-in-waiting—the Duchesse de Brancas—who had spoken disrespectfully of the Royal Favourite. The King of Sweden, too, who had been promised subsidies and did not see any chance of obtaining them, was recommended by his Ambassador to write an appealing letter to the King, and a very flattering one to Madame du Barry, and appears to have taken the advice, for M. de Creutz, the Ambassador, is able to report before the end of January that, "the lady who enjoys the King's confidence takes a lively interest in Swedish affairs."

Louis XV was particularly gracious to his Mistress, and according to Pidansat, intended to give her for her *étrennes*, the title of Duchesse de Roquelaine, besides presenting her with a toilet set made of massive gold Pidansat—facts being too strong for him—is obliged

to own that the first never came off, and he might have said the same about the presentation. No mention is to be found of the gold toilet set in any of the many inventories of Madame du Barry's property.

In this same month of January, 1772, the new pavilion which Madame du Barry had had constructed for her at Louveciennes was finished. A report was current that the pavilion was built, of course at an immense expense, in the short period of three months. As a matter of fact the time occupied was more than twelve months, for the work was commenced on December 15, 1770. The expense was very considerable, it is true, but very remote from the "many millions of francs" mentioned by some writers. The architect received one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs for the work executed, and fifty-five thousand francs for his honorarium. This presumably did not include the works of art contained in the buildings. These must have added materially to the cost. There were paintings by Fragonard, Restout, Drouais, and sculpture by Vassé, Pajou, Lecomte, and others. In the rarely-visited gallery of modern sculpture at the Louvre there is a charming figure of Diana which once stood at Louveciennes. The face, which is singularly beautiful, is said to have been copied by the artist, Allegrain, from Madame du Barry, but some doubt exists as to whether the statue is the same, or a replica on a smaller scale.

The pictures appear to have been in good taste, and there were no examples of the indecency which was at this time often found in the houses of the great. In fact, as is not unusual with "ladies of easy virtue" there was an affectation of prudery. The inventory of her pictures contains the entry, "Claude Palimbourg: A female figure,

nude. *Note.* This picture is covered with a curtain of green taffetas."

In Room X, at the Louvre, is a drawing, partly in pen and ink, partly in water colour, representing a fête at Louveciennes, probably the "house-warming." There is an immense deal of work in the drawing, which was executed by Moreau, junior, but the figures are so small and so crowded (the principal personages being in the background), that it is difficult to make out the portraits, and only Madame du Barry and the King can be identified with any certainty.

Besides Louveciennes, mention is made, in a letter of Abbé Terray, of a pavilion which the King ordered to be built at Fontainebleau for Madame du Barry, in the "garden of Diana." The work was abandoned, apparently for want of funds. Marie Antoinette seems to have been very indignant because this structure interfered, or would have interfered, with the view from the windows of "her Aunts'" apartments, but instead of visiting her wrath upon the King, who had ordered the building, she accused Du Barry of impertinence, and was equally indignant with D'Aiguillon who had nothing whatever to do with it. In any case the indignation was wasted, for the building, if even begun, was not completed, or if so was pulled down again directly, for there is no trace of it.

A strange report was current at Vienna at this time, and is mentioned in a letter of Baron de Pichler to Comte Mercy d'Argenteau, to the effect that the Duc d'Aiguillon was having frequent interviews with Madame Louise—the daughter of Louis XV who was in a Carmelite nunnery at St. Denis—to persuade her to petition the Pope to dissolve the marriage of Madame du Barry,

in order to allow her to marry the King. Comte Mercy is informed that Maria Theresa does not care whether this is arranged or not,—thinks on the whole that it would be better for the King's conscience if it could be managed,—but in any case would like to know whether there was any foundation for the report.

There was some partial foundation for the rumour perhaps, in the fact that Madame du Barry had applied for a separation from her husband. As she had left him at the church door, she could not very well bring a charge of cruelty against him, but some of the begging letters he had written to her contained forcible expressions which could be construed into threats. He judged it advisable to make no opposition to her petition, and on April 2, 1772, a separation was pronounced. He received in return an annuity of sixteen thousand francs. This separation, combined with the knowledge that Sister Louise was known to feel very strongly about her father "living in sin," may have caused the report as to the divorce.

If the Pope was applied to, he refused his consent to the divorce, but he granted Madame du Barry permission to enter, whenever she liked, the Convent of St. Elizabeth at Paris, to see her mother, who was living there under the name of Madame de Montrabé. Jeanne du Barry was not wanting in filial affection, and visited her mother once a fortnight, staying several hours on each occasion. The Mother Superior was base enough, Pidansat says, to send her niece, who sang beautifully, to amuse the Comtesse at dinner, on these occasions.

On July 4, this year, there is an entry in the register of the Church of Notre Dame at Versailles, relating to the baptism of Louis Benoist Zamor, aged about ten

years, a negro in the service of Madame la Comtesse du Barry. The sponsors were the High and Powerful Prince, Louis Francis Joseph de Bourbon, Comte de la Marche, represented by his "concierge," and the High and Powerful Lady Benedicte de Vaubergny (*sic*), Comtesse du Barry, represented by her chief maid.

It was the custom at that time for ladies of high rank to be attended by negro pages. Madame de Pompadour had two negroes, and Du Barry, who aped her predecessor in many things, also took into her service a negro boy,—a step which, in after years, she had bitter reason to regret. Zamor, though always called a negro, was really a native of Bengal, brought over to France by an English captain, who had sold him, or given him away,—perhaps to De Maupeou, for Carlyle speaks of his "gallantly presenting the scarlet Enchantress with dwarf Negroes,"—though he does not state the authority. Zamor was neither a dwarf nor a negro, but as Madame du Barry had no other coloured servant, he must be intended.

He was about seven years old when he entered the service of the King's Mistress. She had him taught to read and write, and saw that he received some religious instruction. He picked up a smattering of general information too, for he was as quick as a monkey and quite as mischievous. His pranks are said to have delighted the old King, who, to reward him for some more than ordinarily bold trick, made this little spoiled imp Governor of the Château and Pavilion of Louveciennes, with a salary of six hundred francs a year, and even sent for the Chancellor to draw up the *brevet* of the appointment, and affix thereto the Great Seal. The story is to be found, of course, in the *Anecdotes*, and has been copied by many sub-

sequent writers. Zamor was always magnificently dressed, and no doubt this petted, spoiled child gave himself airs in consequence. This might have caused Louis to style him the Governor, or even to bestow a small pension on him, but if he did so, it was done as a joke to amuse Du Barry. At any rate there is no trace of such an appointment in the Archives, nor mention of any sum ever being paid to Zamor, nor—which is the most conclusive argument of all—when Zamor appeared before the Revolutionary tribunal, did Fouquier-Tinville accuse him of having held any post under the “penultimate Capet,” as assuredly he would have done if there had been any ground at all for the charge.

CHAPTER XII

THE WRONGS OF POLAND

(1772)

ON the principle that any stick is good enough to beat a dog with, Madame du Barry has been accused of having been largely concerned in the fate of Poland, and having hastened the division of that unfortunate country, in either one way or the other. For while some historians maintain that, by her ill-advised advocacy of the Polish cause, she precipitated the action of the Powers, others aver that if the Duc de Choiseul had still been at the head of affairs in France, Poland would have been saved, and as Madame du Barry caused the fall of Choiseul, *ergo* she was mainly to blame for the dismemberment of the Polish Kingdom. Historians, no doubt, always endeavour to tell the truth, but it seems a pity that they cannot first, like the characters in a well-known vaudeville, arrange amongst themselves what the truth is going to be.

The examination of these opposite theories is not very interesting,—it leads us too far amongst dusty protocols and worm-eaten archives,—but the task is necessary in order to clear the memory of Jeanne du Barry from imputations she did not deserve.

To begin with the first. Pidansat de Mairobert says that Madame du Barry was really out of place when she interfered in politics. (That was her own impression, and, consequently, she never did.) What could be more absurd, he adds, "than to see Mademoiselle Lange surrounded by deputies from the confederates of Poland soliciting her to implore Louis XV for men and money? And when, seduced by their offers of a large fortune, and estates and titles, in Poland, if the country were saved, she did give her aid, what a blow to her hopes it must have been to find that her projects were futile."

This version seems to have been accepted by some others besides Pidansat. The secret agent of Frederick the Great writes from Paris to his master that Comte Wielhorsky had carried his lamentations to Madame du Barry, who had been deeply moved by them, had exhorted him not to lose courage, and to console him had asked, "Where is Poland?" "Since then the King has shown some interest in Polish affairs."

That Madame du Barry felt deep sympathy for the poor Poles is, no doubt, true, and none but Pidansat and his compeers would dream of thinking the feeling discreditable to her; but there were two good reasons why she was unable to influence or interest the King. The first was that Louis XV had already been keeping an eye on the affairs of Poland for a number of years past. Whilst little Jeanne Becu was conning her lessons at the Convent of Saint Aure, Louis XV was writing to Tercier, one of his secret agents (November 27, 1756), that he should always think and act for the support of the liberty of the Poles, and we know that he stuck to his opinions with even ultra-Bourbon tenacity. He had also supported the

Polish cause with money to some small amount, but after the reverses his arms had met with in the Seven Years' War, had vowed that he would give no more money nor risk a single man in support of the "throsne" (*sic*).

Much as Madame du Barry may have wished to help Comte de Wielhorsky and his friends, she would have found it impossible to make the King give any practical support to the cause, and his moral support,—whatever that was worth,—he had given many years before. That the King's Mistress should have asked, "Where is Poland?" is not at all improbable. Her ignorance would not be at all exceptional. Dumouriez, when the Duc de Choiseul was about to send him to Poland, declared that he did not know the geography of the country, and asked for a delay of a few days in order that he might study it. As for Madame du Barry being seduced by offers of titles and estates, it is unlikely that Comte de Wielhorsky made any such offers, for there was a law in Poland to the effect that no foreigner was to hold landed property in the country.¹

The other charge against Madame du Barry is hardly deserving of criticism. It is based on the misapprehension that she was responsible for the fall of Choiseul, whereas, as we have seen, she had little to do with it. Whether that Minister could have, or would have, prevented the partition of Poland, is an open question. So far as we can judge, he would have done whatever the Austrian Court required of him. In the *Correspondance secrète* is a letter from the head of the secret staff of Louis XV, the Comte de Broglie, in which he says that a M. de

¹ BERNARDIN DE ST. PIERRE, *Voyage en Pologne*.

Mokranosky had informed the Duc de Choiseul that, if the Polish Confederates were recognized by France, and a subsidy of a couple of millions of francs paid, in three months Poland would have a hundred thousand men in the field, the Russian communications would be cut, and that Power glad to withdraw from Poland. The Duc de Choiseul at first adopted these ideas, but *the Court of Vienna always* prevented him from executing them.

Maria Theresa, it should be said, was obstinately opposed to the division of Poland at first, and it was necessary to win over her confessor to persuade her that it was for the good of her soul that she should take the portion allotted to her. But, having once allowed herself to be led into this iniquitous scheme, she was prepared to go further than the other conspirators. Only a bad harvest, a heavy mortality, and the generally wretched condition of her country,—she told her Ambassador—could have caused her to link her interests with those of the “two monsters,” Russia and Prussia. She wept scalding tears for the Poles, so long as their fate was in suspense, but when the booty came to be apportioned out in lots,

“With sobs and tears she sorted out
That of the largest size ;
Holding her pocket-handkerchief
Before her streaming eyes.”

Nothing, she wailed, could have exceeded the wickedness of the act, except its gross unfairness. The division of the unfortunate country was, she said, “most unequal.” It certainly was, but any remark on the subject would have been more apposite if coming from Frederick the Great, for her share in this unequal division was twenty-

five hundred square leagues whilst his was only nine hundred square leagues. As he said sarcastically, to Prince Charles of Hesse,

"She wept terribly, but her troops took possession of their portions, she weeping all the while. All of a sudden we learned that she had seized much more than the part assigned to her, for the more she wept the more she grabbed, and we had a good deal of trouble to make her content herself with her share of the cake: That's just like her."

The Abbé Georgel, who was Secretary to Cardinal Prince Louis de Rohan, the French Ambassador at Vienna, declares that the Cardinal used almost identically the same words in a secret despatch to the Duc d'Aiguillon. The Duc, says the Abbé, showed the letter to Madame du Barry, who read it out to the King at supper. He was heartily amused at the picture of Maria Theresa drying her tears with one hand and seizing the sword with the other, but some courtier, who disliked Rohan, repeated the story to Marie Antoinette who not unreasonably concluded that, as Du Barry had read the letter, she must have received it. "What!" cried the Dauphiness, "a prince, and a prince of the Church, too! in correspondence with a woman of no reputation, and making fun of my mother who loads him with benefits!" And from that day dated the hatred which culminated in the affair of the Diamond Necklace of which, of course, Du Barry was the real *fons et origo*.

But in this instance it is impossible to believe the worthy Abbé. In the first place, as he was Secretary to Cardinal de Rohan, his official duties compelled him to be at Vienna, and granting that he knew that such a

letter was written from there, he could only have hearsay evidence about its reception at Versailles. In the second place it is not borne out by the conduct of the persons concerned. Marie Antoinette would have triumphantly adduced this instance of duplicity and bad manners in answer to the very next recommendation from her mother to keep on good terms with the Favourite, and, moreover, the Dauphiness, knowing that Maria Theresa disliked Cardinal de Rohan, would have had a double motive in repeating a tale that showed him to the Empress in a bad light. Comte Mercy d'Argenteau also never heard the story (though he had a wonderful aptitude for picking up scandal) or he would have repeated it to the Empress. Madame du Barry, too, was so anxious to be in Marie Antoinette's good books that she would never have knocked down at one blow the structure she hoped she was raising. Finally, no trace of the letter can be found amongst the State Papers, and amongst the numerous letters written by the Cardinal to the Minister there is not one gleam of fancy or stroke of satire,—dull and heavy respectability broods over them all. Madame de Campan certainly repeats the story in her *Memoirs*, but as Carlyle has pointed out *in re* the incident of the candle which was blown out as a signal when Louis XV died, her testimony must be received with caution,—for Louis died at two o'clock on a May afternoon, and under those conditions a little candle would not shed its beams very far.

Pascal says that the fate of the world would have been changed if Cleopatra's nose had been an inch shorter, and some ingenious persons have tried to show what the history of England would have been if only Guy Fawkes had succeeded in firing his powder-casks. There is room

for a good deal of guess work in both cases, but hardly any in the historical question we have been considering. Russia, Prussia, and Austria had dragged down their prey, and meant devouring it. France and England in concert might have scared them from their booty, but England was more likely to act against France than with her, and the protests of Choiseul, D'Aiguillon, or any other Minister would have been so much waste paper, unless they had been backed up by an army. As for laying the blame of the division of Poland on the shoulders of Madame du Barry, one might as well blame her for not making improvements in the multiplication table.

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Under the date of August 29, 1772, Bachaumont announces that a book had appeared at London entitled, *Mémoires Authentiques de la Comtesse du Barré*. It professed to be translated from the English, and written by the Chevalier Fr. N——, extracted from a manuscript in the possession of the Duchesse de Villeroy. Even Bachaumont, who could swallow lies gross as a mountain, open, and palpable, owns that there is not a single anecdote in the production that even approaches the truth, and that the author must have counted a good deal on the credulity of the public if he expected to find his book sell.

Fr. N—— possibly stood for François Nogaret—"a writer of erotic novels"—to which class of literature the book belongs. If written for purposes of black-mailing it should at least have had enough of the tin foil of truth to coat the huge bolus of fiction. That this is entirely wanting may be judged from the following short *résumé*. Emilie Palmer is the daughter of a married woman and her lover,

a Canon. The girl grows up to be very beautiful, but, as might be expected, very dissolute. Her mother dies, but the daughter carries on the family tradition and has half-a-dozen love affairs. At last the Duc de Richelieu introduces her to the King on condition that she obtains the pardon of the Duc d'Aiguillon, a proud and cowardly nobleman who is in disgrace for having persecuted La Chalotais. The King falls in love with her at first sight, the Duc is pardoned, the Canon is rewarded (presumably because he is the real father of the young woman), the supposed father is "complimented" (*sic*) with a pension of thirty thousand francs—tempered, it is true, with an order to leave the Court—and all ends happily.

Nevertheless this tissue of absurdities ran through several editions in French, and at least one in English, although the Lieutenant of Police was strictly charged to do all that was possible to prevent copies of the book from coming into Paris. With the French this plan seldom succeeded, for to forbid a book at once caused large numbers to be smuggled in, and the Parisians, though they stood a great deal, would not have put up with a house-to-house visitation as was done in some places. A good story is told of a magistrate of Berne who was instructed to search his district for copies of the *Esprit* of Helvetius, and Voltaire's *Pucelle*, and who in his report to head quarters wrote, "Nous n'avons trouvé dans tout le canton, ni Esprit ni Pucelle."

As a compensation, however, for being made the heroine of this scurrilous romance, Madame du Barry received the following month an autograph letter from Gustavus III, King of Sweden, in which he says that the interest the Comtesse du Barry takes in his success renders it more

agreeable to him; that he has received from his Ambassador a faithful report of the kindness she has shown; and that he confidently hopes that she will continue to show her sympathy and earn his gratitude. The letter must have nearly severed the platonic attachment subsisting between Gustavus III and Madame d'Egmont, for that lady had scolded him severely for desiring Madame du Barry's portrait.

Another practical compliment received by the Royal Mistress about this time was that a war vessel launched at Bordeaux was christened the "Comtesse du Barry." A picture of the launch by Delorge, and in which of course Minerva, Fame, and half-a-dozen genii figure, is preserved in the Versailles Museum. On the border of the drawing is a quatrain in very indifferent verse stating that, as the vessel bears the name of Du Barry, it may brave the storms without fear, Neptune being particularly susceptible to the charms of beauty. What became of this vessel we know not. Probably the ship was no luckier than her namesake, and, under another name, was crippled, sunk, or taken, by Howe, a few years later.

Until the close of this year Madame du Barry had no residence at Versailles except a suite of rooms in the Palace. The accommodation was so small that her servants were obliged to live at the Hôtel de Luynes. On December 7, she purchased from M. René Bidet, principal valet to the Dauphin, a small house situated at the corner of the Avenue de Paris and the Rue de Montboron, which is described in the purchase deed as being situated *near* the town of Versailles. The price was not excessive, being only eighty thousand francs, but the house was small, and quite inadequate for the needs of Madame du Barry, who at

once instructed her architect, Ledoux, to commence building on an extensive scale. The Dauphin is said to have been very annoyed at this, and M. Le Roi, formerly the Librarian at Versailles, and the best authority for topographical information concerning the town, says that Du Barry ostentatiously pushed on the work on purpose to annoy the Prince. What was the cause of the indignation of the Dauphin? It is difficult to conjecture, but it is certain Madame du Barry did not seek to wilfully annoy him, and was even servilely obsequious to him and Marie Antoinette.

The year 1772 concludes with an anecdote about a courtesan who was almost as celebrated in her own sphere as was the Du Barry.

"Mademoiselle Guimard having danced in a little ballet, at an entertainment given by the Comtesse du Barry, has received from the King a pension of fifteen hundred francs. This small favour was accepted on account of the hand that gave it, for it is but a drop of water in the ocean, and will but serve to pay the stage candle-snuffer of this celebrated courtesan."

(*Mémoires secrets*, tome VI. p. 287.)

CHAPTER XIII

A REFRACTORY PRINCESS

(1773)

ON January 1, 1773, the scene which had been enacted on the opening day of the previous year was repeated. Again did Madame du Barry present herself before the Dauphiness, and again did that virtuous Princess, unmindful of the assiduous coaching of her mother and Comte d'Argenteau, snub the Royal Favourite. Let us first hear Marie Antoinette's version of the affair.

"* * * The Favourite came at a time when there were many people. I could not speak to all, so I talked 'in general.' I had reason to think that the Favourite and her sister (meaning her sister-in-law, Mademoiselle du Barry) who is chief adviser, were well satisfied; however, *I believe* that two days afterwards M. d'Aiguillon tried to persuade them that they had been slighted. As to the Minister, he has never complained of my conduct towards him, and, in fact, I have always been careful to treat him the same as the other Ministers."

On the previous New Year's Day, Marie Antoinette had addressed half-a-dozen words to Madame du Barry, but had afterwards declared that "that woman shall

never hear the sound of my voice again," and this year she kept her promise, in the spirit, though not exactly to the letter by speaking "in general." Comte Mercy d'Argenteau's letter to Maria Theresa shows that Marie Antoinette had offered up the Dauphin at the shrine of Du Barry, and seemed to think that this vicarious sacrifice was sufficient to relieve her from an unpleasant task.

"My remonstrances had the effect of causing the Archduchess to speak to the Dauphin on the subjects most essential. She exhorted him to make *a better use of his time*, *** and she strongly insisted on the reasons which rendered it advisable for him to treat the Favourite in a manner which should not displease the King, and so put an end to all the complaints and bickerings to which the Royal Family was subjected. This address made such an impression on the Dauphin that on New Year's Day, when the Favourite presented herself before him, he received her most kindly, and even spoke to her, to the great astonishment of everybody.

"But, as a contrast which I was far from expecting, it happened that the Comtesse du Barry met with *a very bad reception* from the Dauphiness, who did not speak a word to anyone, not even the Duchesse d'Aiguillon or the Maréchale de Mirepoix, who accompanied the Favourite.

"I was as much surprised as dismayed at this incident and without loss of time at once complained to the Archduchess. Her Royal Highness appeared embarrassed *** she told me that she thought she had done enough in persuading the Dauphin to bow with a good grace to circumstances, that for herself in speaking to no one she had treated everybody equally, and consequently no one had any reason to complain. She insisted that, when I

gave an account to Your Majesty of the incident, I should tone down the details as much as possible.

"I busied myself, in the first place, to remedy any ill-effects that might have been caused by the incident. I found the Favourite was much annoyed, but I told her and her sister-in-law what an important service the Dauphiness had rendered them by inducing the Dauphin to show them kindness, and I finally persuaded them they ought to be satisfied. The Favourite even requested me to express her respectful thanks to Her Royal Highness, so all was quiet in *that* quarter.

"I did not get off so cheaply with the Duc d'Aiguillon, who said, amongst other sarcastic remarks, that it seemed as though the Dauphiness tried to annoy the King by the manner in which she treated those whom he most cared for."

Comte d'Argenteau blustered a bit, and pretended to think that D'Aiguillon was using threatening language, which compelled the Minister to declare that he was speaking in the interests of the Dauphiness, who, if she wished to please the King, "had only to employ the graces that nature had given her." One can imagine D'Aiguillon as he said this, smiling inwardly at the strange mixture of unbending pride and plastic morality displayed by the Princess. That she should refuse to hold any intercourse with the mistress of her grandfather was perfectly right and proper, and she was perhaps even justified in not complying with her mother's persistent requests to her to show some marks of friendliness, however slight, to Madame du Barry. But this austere morality was strictly personal, and she could adjure her husband "to make better use of his time,"—the best use that he could make of it apparently being to try and obtain the good-will of the King's Mistress.

In half-a-dozen details of the incident Marie Antoinette shows too plainly that she is the daughter of Maria Theresa, and, like her mother, not unacquainted with the cult of Convenience. The idea that a little extra politeness on the part of her husband could excuse or condone some extra rudeness on her own part is peculiar, but in extenuation it should be remembered that Marie Antoinette had at this time barely completed her seventeenth year.

Some pity must be felt for Maria Theresa, and a good deal for poor Comte d'Argenteau, always leading that recalcitrant filly, the Princess, up to the Du Barry hedge, only to find her shy more violently each time, refuse to take the obstacle, and throw off all the good advice with which she had been carefully loaded. But they stuck to their task. On January 31, *Sysipha secunda* is writing to her daughter,

"I am not at all pleased to hear how New Year's Day passed. * * * The fault must be repaired on the earliest opportunity; the month of February will do as well for that as January. I do not think I am too exacting in requiring you to speak unaffectedly to the Favourite four or five times a year, and the best way to checkmate M. d'Aiguillon is to give him no cause for complaint on this score."

Despite all this advice and all these remonstrances Marie Antoinette would not budge from her position, but she was not quite easy in her conscience, and advanced a number of "specious reasons," Comte d'Argenteau says, in explanation of her conduct. To which he replied that she could not conceal from herself three "real truths"; (1) that she had acted in direct opposition to the advice and will of her august mother; (2) that she had given

Madame du Barry a very bad reception; and (3) that the ill-will of the Favourite might be dangerous or destructive to certain political schemes. To all of which the young Princess replied as usual with promises to behave better in future,—and broke her promise, as usual, when it came to the point.

Towards the close of the year 1772, a young actress, named Mademoiselle Raucourt, appeared in Paris, and quickly became a popular favourite. Her age was only sixteen and a half, she possessed a beautiful face and figure, wonderful intelligence, and a voice of rare power and sweetness. Louis XV was anxious to see this paragon. Early in January, 1773, she performed at Versailles, in a tragedy entitled *Didon*, by Lefranc de Pompignan. Throughout a long and trying part “she did not make one wrong intonation or one unsuitable gesture.” The King was delighted: he presented her with fifty louis, gave orders that she should be enrolled in the company of the Comédie Française, and testified his approbation of the talent of the actress by actually sitting through the whole performance, for it was usually his habit to retire long before the end of the play,—a custom for which he could certainly not be blamed when the piece was a tragedy by a third rate writer.

Mademoiselle Raucourt not only drove away the King’s *ennui*, but she also won the good opinion of Madame du Barry. The fair Comtesse asked her which she would prefer, three dresses for her own use or a stage costume. The actress replied that as the Comtesse gave her her choice she would prefer the stage costume by which the public also would be a gainer.¹

¹ *Mémoires secrets*, vol. VI. p. 302.

She duly received the costume. It was supplied by Lenormand, and cost the respectable sum of six thousand and six hundred francs. In return, the actress afterwards had her portrait engraved, with the arms of Madame du Barry at the foot, and presented a copy to her admirer. One reason for the friendship that subsisted between them was that Madame du Barry believed Mademoiselle Raucourt to be a compatriot from Lorraine. She was, moreover, *une enfant de la balle*, and her parents had been members of the company of the Court Theatre of Stanislas, King of Poland, in whose household was also Charles Becu, the uncle of Madame du Barry. The actress discreetly preserved silence on the subject, and it was not till many years later that M. Jal discovered that she was really born at Paris.

Pidansat de Mairobert, ever on the sharp look-out for indecencies, declares that Madame du Barry, feeling that she had nothing to fear from such a rival, caused the young girl to be brought to the salon attached to the royal box, and "it is to be presumed" that there was enacted a scene,—which need not be described here. For anyone who is happily not a Pidansat de Mairobert it is quite as easy to "presume" a decency as an indecency, and there are several good reasons for stamping Pidansat's disgusting innuendo as a foul lie. Du Barry differed widely from De Pompadour, physically as well as morally, and never abetted Louis in any amours. Mademoiselle Raucourt also was a "tiger of virtue" at this time, and had astonished and vexed the gilded youth of Paris by refusing the most tempting offers of "opulent vice." She did fall, some months later, and became one of the most notorious courtesans of the day, but her virtue at

this time, though often assailed, had hitherto proved impregnable. Finally we know that on this very evening Louis introduced her as the "Queen of Carthage" to the Dauphiness, and, vicious as he was, he had too much respect for the youth and purity of the Princess to have done that, if there had been any truth in the "presumed" story of the private salon.

Later in the year—in August—Mademoiselle Raucourt again acted before the King at Compiègne. On that occasion she also "took a benefit," and Madame du Barry interested herself in selling tickets to the courtiers. Twenty years later they met under strangely different circumstances—in the prison of Sainte Pelagie.

During the Carnival of this year—1773—Mademoiselle Raucourt also took part in an entertainment given by Madame du Barry at her new Hôtel at Versailles. A masque by the Abbé de Voisenon, who was indecent when he wrote prose, and dull when he wrote verse, was performed, along with several little pieces and delightful ballets. The evening concluded with a grand supper, and a ball. The entertainment was almost a repetition of a fête which had been given a few nights previously by the Duc and Duchesse d'Aiguillon. These fêtes—according to Pidansat—were given by the Duc d'Aiguillon and Madame du Barry respectively, "in order to better announce their league"—surely the most original method of promulgating the news of a political combination ever yet devised.

The King was not present at Madame du Barry's, though he was at the D'Aiguillons,' and even bantered the Chancellor about a "black serpent" mentioned in one of the pieces,—an allusion supposed to have reference to De

Maupeou, who vented his wrath on the author. Madame du Barry was vexed at the absence of her lover, but must have been pleased at some of the tricks devised by Favart, who "stage-managed" the affair. In one of the salons (says Pidansat) hung a large ostrich egg: Madame du Barry was invited to come and look at it, and as she gazed, it opened, and a Cupid came out of it. This was intended to symbolize that a look from her was sufficient to "hatch Love." The "conceit" was quite in accordance with the spirit of the times, and there is no reason why it should not have been devised and played, but we should very much like to know where Pidansat obtained his information. He is so often indebted to his imagination for his facts that he cannot be trusted even when there is no reason why he should not be telling the truth. One of the pieces composed by Voisenon was intitled "The Barometer Seller." The actor who played the part applied all the terms written on the face of a weather-glass to personages of the Court. Madame du Barry was "Set Fair"; the King, "Change"; and the Chancellor, "Stormy."

CHAPTER XIV

THE KING'S COFFEE POT

(1773)

THE Choiseul party, which was still very strong at the Court, did not view with pleasure the growing intimacy between the Minister and the Mistress. Sarcastic remarks were often made about the Favourite—to whom, of course, they were duly repeated—the authors of these remarks, being, as might be naturally supposed, generally ladies. On several occasions Madame du Barry, nettled at some witticism more than ordinarily sharp, had complained to the King, who usually laughed and told his irate Mistress to take no notice of the chatter of a parcel of idle women.

Presumably Madame du Barry took this good advice, but an extraordinary story circulated to some extent, that she once revenged herself on one of her persecutors in a very forcible and decidedly unladylike manner. The story is, of course, found in the *Anecdotes*,—it is exactly the style of thing which Pidansat would be sure to relate if he did not invent, and if it were found nowhere else we should have no difficulty in believing that he invented it. But it is also found in Hardy's *Memoirs*,

though the honest bookseller is careful to head his record of the incident, "Singular, and perhaps false, adventure of a lady of the Court." As the account given in the *Anecdotes* is the more explicit, we will take the story from the pages of Pidansat de Mairobert.

"The Marquise de Rosen, one of the ladies-in-waiting of the Comtesse de Provence, for some time past paid assiduous court to Madame du Barry, who greatly esteemed her, and became intimate with her. She (the Marquise) was extremely young, delicate, and childish in appearance. The favourite invited her to the fête, and Madame de Rosen was present at it, but shortly afterwards, suddenly broke with her friend, or at least grew considerably cooler. It is probable that the Princess, to whose suite she belonged, had reproved her for visiting a person so notorious, and assisting at the fête she had given. However that may be, the Comtesse noticed the change, and complained to the King, who said, jokingly, 'Bah! she is only a child who deserves to be whipped.' Madame du Barry took the remark in its strict sense. One morning that Madame de Rosen came to see her, after they had breakfasted together amicably, the Comtesse asked her to enter the boudoir that they might chat together in private. Four of the maids of Madame du Barry were waiting there; they seized Madame de Rosen and gave her a sound flogging. Furious with indignation she rushed off to the King, but he could say nothing to his mistress, as she reminded him that she had but executed his sentence. The whole affair ended in smoke, for Madame de Rosen, by the advice of M. d'Aiguillon, paid a visit to the Comtesse. After a little joking about the whipping, which made known and confirmed the anecdote, the two friends

embraced, and agreed that all should be forgotten. But the public forgets nothing, nor does the Comtesse de Provence forget either. Happily for Madame du Barry, the Princess had not the power to revenge herself."

Like nineteen out of every twenty of Pidansat's anecdotes, the story will not bear examination. It is recorded that during the performance of a drama at one of the minor "Surrey side" theatres, a voice came from the gallery, "We don't expect grammar, but you *might* join the flats," and in perusing the *Anecdotes* the old joke is continually borne to mind. Never by any chance do the flats join. The above quoted incident is a fair specimen of this peculiarity. When examined carefully, it is found to contain as many discrepancies as the "Item the Editor could not understand," which forms the subject of one of Mark Twain's sketches.

To begin with the question of chronology. Pidansat does not give the date of Madame de Rosen's supposed flogging,—he very seldom does give dates. In Hardy's *Memoirs*, however, it is entered under the date of Tuesday, February 16, and of course the incident must have taken place a day or two earlier. The next point is to fix the day of Madame du Barry's fête. The fête given by the Duc d'Aiguillon was on February 18, and we know Madame du Barry's was subsequent to that. If we are not mistaken, Shrove-Tuesday, the last day of Carnival, and the most likely day for this fête, was February 22. According to the *Nouvelles à la main*, the fête was given on the 23rd, but even in these days of telegraphic communication "yesterday" has a very elastic meaning in a French paper.

In any case we are confronted with this difficulty. Madame de Rosen was whipped prior to February 16,

and Madame du Barry's fête was given sometime between February 19 and February 24; how then could the Comtesse de Provence reproach her lady-in-waiting for attending an entertainment that had not taken place? But we will waive this point, and allow that Madame de Rosen was scolded for frequenting the company of a person so notorious as Madame du Barry. The young Marquise at once dropped her friend (*rompit tout à coup*), or at least became much colder. *Soit*, but, that being the case, how came she to be lunching amicably with the King's mistress only a few days later? If she had entirely broken off all intimacy with the Favourite, she could not have fallen into the ambush prepared for her; if she had *not* severed the friendship, and still lunched and chatted with "*une personne aussi affichée*" what cause had Madame du Barry to feel resentment? On the contrary she must have been flattered to think that Madame de Rosen could for her sake disregard the orders of the Comtesse de Provence.

But even if the "flats joined," and the story had been told with unimpugnable circumstantiality we should have cause to doubt it. If it had been true, or if not true a matter of common report, why is there no mention of it in the many *Memoirs* which have been handed down to us? Why are De Besenval, De Belleval, Campan, Grimm, Marmontel, and a host of others silent on the subject? Comte Mercy d'Argenteau and the Dauphiness would each have sent off their version of the event to Maria Theresa; Madame du Deffant, who, though she had lost her eyes, was all ears, and heard everything that went on—and much that did not—would have delighted Horace Walpole with such a choice bit of scandal; and

that journalistic *chiffonnier*, Bachaumont, ever prowling in search of literary garbage, would not have missed such a prize.

How did Hardy, sitting in his back parlour behind the book-shop, hear a rumour which escaped everyone else? He owns the story is incredible, and that "if it occurred as narrated the lady could never again appear at Court, for she would be unceasingly exposed to the jokes of the courtiers." The whipper, and the whippiee, might mutually agree to let all be forgotten, but "the public forgets nothing" as Pidansat says. Madame de Rosen, however, did not leave the Court. Not being a well-known personage there are few mentions of her made in the records of the year. On April 25, Bachaumont notices that she had been robbed, and if the story of the flogging had reached him "too late for insertion," he would have made some allusion to her previous misfortune. Later in the year there is another mention of her, and one which appears to put the *coup de grâce* to the story of the flogging. In August—the Court being then at Compiègne—came the fête of St. Louis, the King's patron saint. High mass was celebrated, and the King, Princes of the blood, Ambassadors, and all the Court were present. On such occasions it is considered a great honour to make the *quête*, or collection. Particulars of the ceremony were given in the *Gazette de France*, and amongst the names of the young ladies who made the *quête*, figures the Comtesse de Rosen, lady-in-waiting to the Comtesse de Provence.

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Of all the anecdotes related of Madame du Barry the best known (at least to French readers) is "the story of

the coffee-pot." It has found a place in every history or essay, which treats of the 18th century, and has been used to point a moral and show to what a pitch of moral degradation Louis XV had fallen, when he allowed a woman like Jeanne du Barry to treat him with familiarity.

To the average English reader the story is not so well known, partly because it cannot be translated, and partly because but few English historians have cared, or dared, to say much about the last of the "Queens of the left hand."

The *Anecdotes* relate the incident very briefly. "His Majesty likes to prepare his coffee himself, and to forget in such innocent occupations the cares and troubles of governing. One day not long ago the coffee-pot was on the fire, and, His Majesty being busy over something else, it boiled over.

"*'Eh, La France, prends donc garde, ton café f— le camp !'*" cried the fair favourite."

The sentence is but a short one, but it suggests three questions. Did Madame du Barry *tutoyer* the King? did she call him *La France*? did she use a coarse and over-familiar expression in his presence. Lastly, how did the story, if true, get known abroad? The expression, if used at all, was uttered in the privacy of the King's bed-chamber. Who reported it? Surely neither the King himself, nor Madame du Barry, and if any valet was present, Pidansat would have been glad to give his name as an authority.

To "*tutoyer*," or use the second person singular of a verb instead of the second person plural is, in French, a mark of familiarity or superiority. A man and his mistress *se tutoyaient* when they belong to the same rank, or as a

sign of affection if there is a wide difference in rank, but no one, except a member of the Royal Family, would *tutoyer* a king. If Louis XV and Madame du Barry mutually used this endearing familiarity in conversation, they would also have used it in writing to each other. A series of letters, which had passed between them, had been in the hands of Comte Mercy d'Argenteau—the person of all others likely to attach an even undue importance to such a form—and he evidently found no use of the “thou” in any of the notes. In the narrative of De Bellevall, relating how Madame du Barry saved the life of a deserter,¹ she addresses the King as “Sire.” If they had used the expression in public, a dozen observers would have noted it and set it down in their memoirs; if they only used it in private who could have known of it? Or are we expected to believe that Madame du Barry addressed the King as “thou” when they were alone, and instantly changed to “Sire” the moment a third person entered the room? Her giddy, little head would have been unequal to the task.

Coming to the second point we notice that she calls the King “La France.” “So she named her royal valet,” says Carlyle, quoting from Besenval apparently. One erudite historian—M. Henry Martin—says that she gave the King the name of a valet in a comedy. She did worse; she gave him the name of one of her footmen. A servant, named La France, had been in her employment some years. The liveries for her servants were supplied by a Paris tailor, named Carlier. In the accounts he sent in he specified the articles supplied, and the servants for

¹ Related on page 137, ante.

whom they were intended. Under the date May 30, 1770, he mentions "four dress coats of blue *baracan* (whatever that may be) for Augustin, *La France*, François and Etienne." On June 1, Mathurin, *La France*, Comtois, and another, received four "*redingottes*" with "eight dozen big buttons of a thousand points," and "morning jackets à *bavaroise*." In January, 1771, *La France* and Picard had fresh "*redingottes*" of grey cloth, and *La France* had a ratteen waistcoat.

La France seems to have been a gorgeous menial,—what Thackeray would have called the *ne plush ultra* of Jameses, but it is doubtful if Louis XV would have liked to have been confounded with him, or that Madame du Barry would have used a familiarity that bordered so dangerously near contempt. Possibly some memoir writer—Besenval or another—chancing to be at Louveciennes at some grand dinner or "function" heard Madame du Barry address the lackey as "*La France*," and blundered into the belief that the words were meant for the King, and it must be owned that the mistake was an excusable one, for *La France* is not a common name we should imagine, and would fit the monarch better than the menial.

As for the objectionable word, designated by the not over squeamish Pidansat de Mairobert by an initial letter with the aposiopetic break after it, there is reason to believe, we fear, that both Madame du Barry and the King were in the habit of using it. Indeed we know that he had used it before she was born,—notably when he was told that his wholesale depravation of the De Nesle family had rendered him unpopular—so that he was certainly not shocked, or even surprised, when the expression dropped from the tiny rosebud mouth of Jeanne

du Barry. In fact the word was uttered a dozen times a day by every male and nearly every female courtier. The use of the word is the only consistent and appropriate detail in the story, and we may be thankful to Pidansat de Mairobert for at least showing some dramatic fitness in front of his ill-joined flats.¹

One more question suggests itself before we quite finish with the story. Was Louis XV in the habit of preparing his own coffee? M. Le Roi, the historian of Versailles, says that a dozen coffee trees grew in the hothouses of the Palace, and from these was obtained every year a small quantity of berries—five or six pounds. Louis XV allowed this to “age,” roasted it himself, prepared the infusion, and let those courtiers who were experienced *gourmets* taste it, and they declared that they could hardly distinguish it from the best foreign coffee.

Five or six pounds of coffee berries, even if used for strictly personal consumption, would not have provided the King with his matutinal cup throughout the year, and, though the King might have amused himself in preparing his home-grown berries, it does not follow that he should have conferred the same honour on the coffee procured from the “grocer by appointment,” though he had a taste for cooking, derived from one of the young nobles with whom he was educated. In the 18th century, monarchs must have had a mania for making their own coffee, for Madame Lebrun records in her *Souvenirs* that the Empress Cathar-

¹In a *Life of Louis XV*, translated by J. O. Justamond, and published at Dublin in 1781, the author renders the remark, “Eh, France! your coffee is boiling over at a d—l of a rate,”—which is a much watered-down rendering of the original version.

ine of Russia, "rose at 5.0 a.m., lighted her own fire (!) and made her own coffee." As M. Vatel observes, she forgets to add whether she "took in" the milk herself. In the *Registres des magasins* of Versailles Palace mention is made of a "side closet where the King's coffee is made,"—not "where the King makes his coffee," which is quite a different thing. On the whole we may infer that, though Louis XV may have prepared his morning drink, there is no evidence to show that he did, and it is just as easy to believe that he did not, but, of course, in the latter case, the whole story about the too briskly ebullient pot, and the consequent coarse counsel of Madame du Barry, comes down also,—which perhaps is no very great loss.

The date of this incident of the coffee-pot is given as March, 1773, and it was during this same Lent season that the Abbé de Beauvais was said to have incurred the resentment of the Favourite by a passage in a sermon which he preached before King and Court in the Chapel Royal at Versailles. Taking for his subject the life of Solomon, the Abbé is reported to have said that the Wise King, "worn out by all sorts of pleasures, sought to revive his jaded senses by resorting to the lowest haunts of public vice."

The allusion is evident, but if the Abbé ever said anything of the kind he rather slandered Solomon for the purpose of "getting at" Louis XV. No charge of the kind is brought against the King of Israel in the Old Testament, and in view of his phenomenally extensive seraglio the accusation would be incredible. After the death of the Abbé de Beauvais, his sermons, addresses, and funeral panegyrics,

—the latter no small part of the literary luggage of an eloquent ecclesiastic in those days—were published in four volumes. Not a trace of the passage can be found, but it may have been cut out by a timid editor.

Yet another instance of the difficulty of reconciling conflicting accounts. In the *Mémoires secrets* it is related that when La Harpe read before Madame du Barry his tragedy of *Les Barmecides*, the Favourite, though she declared it to be very fine, yawned terribly. Madame du Deffant, in a letter to the Duchesse de Choiseul, declares that the play was read before the King and his Mistress, and at the end Louis XV turned towards Du Barry, and said, “Madame, did not that make you yawn a great deal?” In another chronicle it is averred that the phrase was addressed by the King to the Comtesse d’Artois after the performance of *Ismenor* at the Opera. The matter is trivial enough, but it shows the difficulty of running to earth even an unimportant story.

CHAPTER XV

PROVIDING FOR RELATIONS

(1773)

THE nephew of Madame du Barry, the Vicomte Adolphe, as he was generally called, was at this time a young man of twenty-four, and in search of a wife. He was not a bad match in any respect, for he was good-looking, held the position of *mestre de camp*, which was equivalent to colonel, and it was more than suspected that his aunt would "come down handsomely" in the way of a marriage portion. The unvarnished Pidansat de Mairobert asserts that it was at first intended to give him the hand of Mademoiselle de Saint André, a natural daughter of the King, but that her guardian, M. de Saint Yon, protested so energetically against the marriage, that the project was abandoned. Foiled in this, the aunt and nephew then began to look out for a young lady of good family and no fortune. There was no lack of candidates, and on June 27, in the *Nouvelles de la main Penthièvre* we find, "There is talk of the marriage of Vicomte du Barry to Mademoiselle de Tourmon: it is asserted that it will take place shortly." The information was quite correct, and the marriage was celebrated on July 19.

The bride was an exceedingly pretty girl, and related to the noble house of Soubise. Madame du Deffant heard that she "was very like the Duchesse de Châteauroux, only better looking."

The marriage contract was drawn up by Garnier Deschènes, the notary of the bridegroom's father, and Le Pot d'Auteuil, the notary of Madame du Barry,—he who had been terrified into indiscretion when he saw the Nuncio and the Cardinal putting on the Favourite's slippers. The document was duly signed at Versailles the evening before the wedding. It bears one of the most curious and valuable collections of autographs ever got together on a single sheet of paper, as the reader may judge from the subjoined list.

LOUIS (Louis XV).

LOUIS AUGUSTE (the Dauphin, afterwards Louis XVI).

MARIE ANTOINETTE.

STANISLAS XAVIER (Comte de Provence, afterwards Louis XVIII).

MARIE JOSEPHINE LOUISE (his wife).

MARIE ADELAIDE	}	(daughters of Louis XV).
VICTOIRE LOUISE		
SOPHIE PHILIPPE		

Immediately beneath these august signatures follow,

JEANNE GOMARD VAUBERNIER (Madame du Barry).

COMTE JEAN DU BARRY (her brother-in-law, the "*Roué*").

JEAN BAPTISTE, VICOMTE DU BARRY (the bridegroom).

FRANÇOISE DU BARRY (the sister of Comte Jean, and companion of Madame du Barry, familiarly known as "Chon").

CHEVALIER DU BARRY (Comte Jean's younger brother).

COMTE DE TOURNON.

SOUVERAINE DE TRILEMONT, CONTAICE (*sic*) DE TOURNON.

ROSE MARIE HÉLÈNE DE TOURNON (the bride).

SOPHIE DE TOURNON (her sister),

and several friends of either family.

Of course the members of the Royal Family signed first, but they knew well enough that the signatures of the whole Du Barry clan must of necessity follow, and we are therefore surprised to see some of the names in juxtaposition. That the King should sign was natural enough, and that unfortunate fibreless being, the Dauphin, had been told that the best use he could make of his time was to conciliate his grandfather's mistress. The Comte de Provence always looked with a half friendly eye on Madame du Barry, and his wife no doubt followed the lead of her liege lord,—having apparently forgotten the flogging administered to her lady-in-waiting. The Comte d'Artois, too, was as likely to be with Madame du Barry as against her,—but the others? The three daughters of Louis XV—"Rag," "Pig," and "Snip," as he lovingly termed them—hated the favourite with an intensity surpassing the average hate of woman. They were at the bottom of every plot against Du Barry, and they headed off their niece if they saw she intended to be civil to the Favourite, and rated her soundly if she forgot for a moment to snub the Royal Mistress. And Marie Antoinette herself—*que diable fait-elle dans cette galère ?*

The only explanation is that they considered that the young Vicomte was not responsible for his aunt's morals, and they signed out of respect for him and the bride and her family. But they had none of them shown any previous consideration for the young Vicomte. Even the

Dauphin, when he heard that Louis XV intended to give "Adolphe" du Barry an appointment in his (the Dauphin's) suite, found a feeble flicker of spirit, and cried, "Then I will shove my foot in his face the first time he comes to take my boots off."

However, the royal witnesses, who appended their signatures to the contract, must have doubtless heard it read. They must have smiled at the long string of titles which that gambler and debauchee Jean du Barry had invented for himself, for he figured in the deed as lord of at least a dozen manors though his domains only comprised some score or so of mud huts. They must also have listened to the record of the generosity of Madame du Barry, who had promised the newly married couple the sum of two hundred thousand francs. Several writers have declared that Madame du Barry was giving away what did not belong to her, for, as she took all the money she spent from the Treasury, it was poor over-taxed Jacques Bonhomme who virtually paid for all her extravagance. This is no doubt true, but in the present instance the reproach was not deserved, for the money was never paid, or at least the principal was not. She had not, or could not spare, the sum, and after the death of the King, a few months later, was of course unable to raise such a sum without crippling her resources, but she continued to pay the interest until November, 1791.

Before quitting the subject of the marriage it should be mentioned that towards the end of June a song about Madame du Barry was very popular in Paris. The authorship of this production was ascribed to Jean du Barry, who was believed to have quarrelled with his sister-in-law. Madame du Deffant, writing to the Duchesse de Choiseul, says.

"It is reported that there are songs against Madame du Barry, written by her brother-in-law. If I can procure them I will send them to you."

The Duchesse and her husband had pocketed the large sum of three hundred thousand francs, and were in receipt of a pension of sixty thousand francs a year, all of which had been procured them through the good offices of Madame du Barry, and of course they were in a position to thoroughly appreciate any songs or lampoons in which she was held up to ridicule. "There's a good deal of human nature in man," even in Dukes and Duchesses. The writer of the *Mémoires secrets*, like Madame de Deffant, is uncertain if the song was by Comte Jean, but Pidansat de Mairobert has no doubts whatever on the subject. But even if Jean du Barry had been capable of writing the song, he knew too well on which side his bread was buttered, as common people say, ever to quarrel with his sister-in-law—so long as she was in favour at least. The handsome marriage portion given by Madame du Barry to his son at the very time when the song was most popular is perhaps the best refutation of the rumour.

A few days after the wedding—August 1—the Court being then at Compiègne, the young Vicomtesse was formally presented to the King and the Dauphin, Madame du Barry acting as sponsor to her niece. Pidansat pretends that they were very badly received by the Dauphin.

"The Prince was standing at a window, 'tabouring' with his fingers on the pane.' In vain they waited for him to look round, and fulfil the usual formalities. He did not speak a word, or cease his occupation, and they were obliged to go out as they had come in. The two beauties, however, were worth a glance."

If the Dauphin did behave in the manner described, he was deficient in good sense as well as in politeness. He would be perfectly justified in giving the cut direct to the Comtesse du Barry but not to the Vicomtesse,—more especially as he had signed her marriage contract only a few days before. Comte Mercy also reports that neither the King nor the Dauphin spoke to the young Vicomtesse, though he does not say that either turned his back on her. Since the advent of Madame du Barry the King hardly glanced at, and did not speak to, any *débutante* who was more than ordinarily pretty, perhaps because he was afraid of making his mistress jealous, or he wished to avoid temptation. There was some reason for his conduct if the young Vicomtesse “greatly resembled the Duchesse de Châteauroux, but was better looking.”

The beauty of the young Vicomtesse affords Pidansat a good chance for scandal, but, as usual, he cannot make his flats join. He begins by declaring that Madame du Barry was so jealous of Mademoiselle de Tournon that she did her best to break off the projected marriage. Then he thinks better (or rather worse) of his statement, and avers that when the Favourite was told how lovely her nephew's *fiancée* was, she cried, “So much the better: the situation will not go out of the family”; and he concludes with an insinuation so disgusting that it cannot be repeated. The refutation of the charge would entail the stirring up of so much filth that it must be left unanswered.

Soon after the marriage of Vicomte Adolphe, another member of the Du Barry family also took a wife. This was the Chevalier du Barry, the third brother, Nicolas, or, as he was more generally called, Elie du Barry. He

espoused a Mademoiselle de Fumel. Neither of the brothers had the slightest right to any title, and, possibly, if they had lived under Louis XIV instead of Louis XV, both Jean and Guillaume (the husband of Madame du Barry) would have been punished for usurping the title of Comte, but Elie du Barry went farther still,—created himself a Marquis and was known as the Marquis d'Hargicourt. His wife, however, seems to have kept the name of Du Barry whilst taking the title of Marquise, which is the cause of some confusion of persons, even their contemporaries failing sometimes to distinguish between the Comtesse, the Vicomtesse and the Marquise.

Voltaire, now in his eightieth year, was living at this time in seclusion at Ferney. M. de la Borde, the principal *valet de chambre* of Louis XV, having occasion to pass near Ferney in the course of some journey he was undertaking, either for the King's business or his own pleasure, he was desired by Madame du Barry to pay a visit to the old philosopher, and bestow upon him, from her, a kiss on either cheek. The commission was faithfully executed, and Voltaire replied with the following letter,

"Madame,

"M. de la Borde informs me that you have ordered him to kiss me on both cheeks on your behalf.

"What! at the close of my life two kisses!

What a priceless gift you have deigned to send.

Two, my Egeria, too much bliss is,

For the joy of the first would hasten my end.

"He has showed me your portrait. Do not scold me, Madame, if I took the liberty of bestowing upon it the two kisses.

"You cannot forbid me to offer you then,
 The tribute of all who your features view:
 To worship your *portrait* suffices for men,
 But the gods alone are worthy of *you*."

"* * * Deign, Madame, to accept the respect of an old hermit, whose heart knows hardly any other sentiment than that of gratitude."

The verses soon became public property, as it is more than probable Voltaire intended they should. They are to be found in half-a-dozen different collections of verse and are mentioned by several of the memoir-writers. The Duchesse de Choiseul sent a mangled version of them to Madame de Deffant, adding the (for her) natural but not the less improper remark, "Voltaire has sullied his pen in his old age."

It was the highest compliment Madame du Barry ever received, for the old giant was more apt to deal in vinegar than in honey.

In the November of this year the Comte d'Artois, (afterwards Charles X) was married to Maria Theresa of Savoy. The event was celebrated by a Royal banquet at which—a writer of the *Nouvelles de la main* asserts—Madame du Barry was present, and sat opposite the King. She looked glorious as the sun, and wore diamonds and other precious stones to the value of five million francs. Her presence at table was a sign that she was regarded as "one of the family," for only members of the Royal Family were invited. It was noticed that during the whole of the repast she cast loving glances at the King, which he returned with interest, being, says the reporter, evidently glad of an opportunity to give a denial to the rumours that his Mistress was no longer in the royal

favour, whilst on her part she showed grateful respect.

On the day of the marriage (Tuesday, November 27) His Majesty played at lansquenet with the Dauphin, the Dauphiness, Comte and Comtesse de Provence, Comte and Comtesse d'Artois, Mesdames de France, the Prince de Condé, Prince de Soubise, Duc de la Vallière, Marquis de Laverdy, etc. Madame du Barry was also present. During the evening a number of thieves, richly dressed, who had contrived to gain admission, reaped a rich harvest of watches, snuff-boxes, and well-filled purses.

On the following evening the King supped in the apartment of Madame du Barry. The Marquis de Chauvelin, an intimate friend and great favourite of the King, who was also invited, played a few games of whist with the King, but begged to be excused from partaking of the supper, as he did not feel very well. He ate only two roasted apples. When play was resumed he joined in a fresh rubber of whist, and the game being finished, leaned over the Maréchale de Mirepoix and chatted to her for some minutes. The King, who was standing opposite, seeing a change in his friend's face, asked him if he did not feel well, but as he spoke, the Marquis fell to the ground, dead. The King was greatly moved by the sad fate of the unfortunate nobleman. De Chauvelin was fifty-seven years of age, witty and well-read, and was the author of several pieces of prose and verse.

The only other incident connected with any member of the Du Barry family that occurred this year, was an attempt to levy black-mail on Comte Guillaume. He was living at Toulouse, whither he had returned directly after his marriage with Jeanne Becu. Some time towards

the close of this year he received an anonymous letter in which he was threatened with death if he did not deposit in a certain place on a given day the sum of five hundred louis. He did not comply with this request, and thereupon received another letter, more threatening than the former, commanding him to pay five hundred and five louis, the extra five being apparently for interest. Guillaume du Barry was so frightened by these re-iterated demands that he at once set off, incognito, for Paris, travelling without any servants for fear his whereabouts should be betrayed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE APPROACHING END

(1774)

THE year 1774—the last year of prosperity for Madame du Barry—dawned brightly enough for her. There was not the usual difficulty with Marie Antoinette, or at least there is no record of any in the letters of Comte Mercy d'Argenteau, though the feelings of the Dauphiness had not changed at all. In fact there was nothing to indicate that in a very few months the Armida Palace would crumble into dust, and Jeanne du Barry would have to exchange the gilded salons of Louveciennes for a cell in the Abbaye of Pont-aux-Dames.

The only portent of the coming storm was a lucky hit in one of the prophetic almanacs. The *Almanach de Liège* at that time enjoyed a reputation akin to that of our own Zadkiel or Old Moore. It contained, and, we believe, does still contain, a number of "prophecies" contrived so as to bear a wide construction, and to take in almost every sort of event. As is always the case with productions of this sort, the ninety and nine failures are never noticed, whilst the one event which, by some stretch of imagination, can be considered as being foretold is considered an instance of almost miraculous prescience.

Amongst other entries in the *Almanach de Liège* was this, "One of the most favoured ladies * * * will play her last part." Madame du Barry had the modesty, says Pidansat, to take this allusion to herself. It would have been very singular if she had not, for assuredly the prophecy was more applicable to her than to anyone else. She took the trouble to buy up and destroy all the copies she could procure in France, and stop the importation of fresh ones. Her efforts to suppress the obnoxious almanac were tolerably successful, for the writer of the *Mémoires secrets* complains how difficult it was to obtain a copy. As a set-off, however, against the evil omen, half-a-dozen almanacs and year books were dedicated to her, and several others contained laudatory verses addressed to her, the execution of which was not always equal to the intention. Some of these books, elegantly bound in morocco, and which were once her property, are now in the Versailles Library.

Out of gratitude, perhaps, for not being snubbed by Marie Antoinette at the reception on New Year's Day, we find Madame du Barry early in January, interesting herself in a scheme for presenting the Dauphiness with some valuable diamonds. Marie Antoinette was extremely fond of precious stones, particularly diamonds, but, it will be seen by the following extract from a letter written by Comte Mercy d'Argenteau to Maria Theresa, she very properly refused to receive them from the hands of Madame du Barry.

"I have brought to the notice of the Dauphiness a number of facts which show how much the Ministers and the party in power desire to be in the good graces of Her Royal Highness. Whilst on this subject I ought to report here a very singular step on the part of the Favourite.

"A Paris jeweller possesses a pair of ear-rings formed of four brilliants of extraordinary size and beauty: the value is estimated at seven hundred thousand livres. The Comtesse du Barry, knowing that the Dauphiness is fond of precious stones, persuaded the Comte de Noailles to show her the diamonds in question, and to add that if Her Royal Highness found them to her taste, and was desirous of keeping them, she need not trouble about either the price or the payment, as means would be taken to persuade the King to give them to her as a present.

"The Archduchess merely replied that she had diamonds enough, and did not intend to increase the number.

"Although this proceeding was in many respects ill-advised, unfitting and maladroit, it nevertheless is a proof of a great desire on the part of the Favourite to insinuate herself into the good graces of the Dauphiness. I may also remark that the idea originated with and was carried out by Madame du Barry alone, for if it had been the result of any settled plan, or had been advised by a third party, I should have been one of the first persons consulted. I may also observe that the kindness, attention and respect on the part of the favourite is not encouraged by any change in the manner in which the Dauphiness treats her. It is true that for some time past Her Royal Highness has abstained from any language which might annoy her, and from showing any signs of aversion or hate, but these are but negative qualities, and I have to be continually on the watch, and explain the actions of the Princess in a way of which they are not always susceptible.

"Although all the ladies who have been presented, and who dance, are admitted to the balls given by the Dauphiness, she has never consented to allow her lady-

in-waiting to invite the Vicomtesse du Barry. This affront very much annoyed the lady, and I had a good deal of trouble to soothe her feelings on this point."

Despite Comte Mercy's belief in his self-importance it is not absolutely certain that Madame du Barry suggested the offer of the jewellery to Marie Antoinette. If so the choice of a messenger was peculiar, for the Comte de Noailles was the French Ambassador to Holland, and was probably *en congé* at the moment. His appearance in the transaction is suggestive that possibly the idea originated with him. In any case Marie Antoinette did wisely to refuse the offer. This was also the opinion of Maria Theresa, who wrote back to Comte Mercy, "The refusal of my daughter to accept jewels offered through the agency of the Favourite is quite right and proper. It is a point upon which I am rather fastidious, and I cannot forgive the Empress of Russia for having accepted, and openly worn, a superb diamond presented to her by her subject Orloff."

But though a proud and haughty princess could not accept diamonds that were offered by a favourite, Madame du Barry cannot be blamed for anything worse than bad taste in making the offer. Her intentions were good, but she could not be expected to view matters from the same mental standpoint that Marie Antoinette did. The Favourite certainly returned good for evil, for "Mesdames" had succeeded in setting the whole Royal Family against everybody who bore the hated name of Du Barry. Comte d'Argenteau, as we have just seen, mentions that the Vicomtesse du Barry, who belonged to one of the best families in France, was never invited to the balls given by the Dauphiness. The taboo also ex-

tended to the latest Madame du Barry, *née* de Fumel. "One of the two nieces of the favourite," says Comte Mercy, "that is to say the Marquise du Barry, although attached to the service of the Comtesse d'Artois in the capacity of lady-in-waiting, has always been treated with the same rigour as all those who bear the name of Du Barry. None of the Royal Family speaks to her, and this young lady, although belonging to a family of good condition, and occupying a position at Court, is very unhappy."

Even Comte Mercy, though he does not make a confusion of persons, fell into an error here. The so-called "Marquise" du Barry was not the niece of the King's Mistress but her sister-in-law. The Austrian Ambassador had the good sense to feel that it was unjust and unfair to visit upon the "Vicomtesse" and the "Marquise" the odium which attached to the name of the Comtesse. He made representations to that effect to Marie Antoinette who felt the truth of them, and, in spite of the opposition of Mesdames, showed less coldness and disdain towards the Marquise,—a slight concession of which the old diplomatist made the most, for as he remarks, "it is only by such means that I have succeeded up to the present in preventing complaints."

"Mesdames," as became old maids of a religious turn of mind, were inflexible in their hate of all who bore the accursed name, and as they could not prevail on the Dauphiness to show herself unjust, they turned their attention to the Dauphin, and even the Comte d'Artois, who previous to his marriage had been neutral, became bitter against the Favourite and all her family. He warned his wife not to speak to Du Barry or to any of her friends, and said

publicly that his household consisted of "all sorts," of whom he would free himself the moment he had the power. Of course these remarks were repeated to the King, who, in return, treated the young Prince with great coldness.

Rumours were even current in the February of this year that, though the King outwardly appeared as attached as ever to his Mistress, his chains were loosening, and Du Barry and her friends were afraid that he might at any moment return to his senses. Comte Mercy d'Argenteau, who in all probability would have liked to see the Favourite in disgrace, for it would have relieved him of a good deal of anxiety, at once set to work to find out if there was any truth in the report. He writes (Feb. 19) to Maria Theresa to inform her that "the King has commenced to think now and then, about his age, the state of his health, and of the alarming account that he will have some day to render to the Supreme Being of the use he has made of the life that has been granted him. These reflections have been occasioned by the death of some of his friends of about the same age, who have died almost before his eyes. The people who encourage the King in his present mode of life are becoming alarmed, and are considering where they should take shelter in case of possible events."

Louis XV had some rudimentary traces of a religion, of a peculiar nature, in his character,—“believed at least in a devil,” as Carlyle says,—and joined to an almost childish dread of death, the belief that he could make the *amende honorable* to God by getting rid of his Mistress for the time being. In the old days of the Parc aux Cerfs he was accustomed to pray with his youthful vic-

tims that they might preserve their orthodoxy. When he was stricken with fever at Metz, he had allowed Châteauroux to be dismissed,—“driven away by sour-faced shavelings”—but, as soon as he recovered, he had sought her out again, and thrown himself at her feet. But he was then thirty years younger, and Du Barry must not have been without serious apprehensions that, if he now had a serious illness, she would be exiled, with little chance of recall, even if he should recover.

She had also other causes for anxiety. The Sieur Thevenot de Morande, encouraged by the success of his former venture, was trying to levy black-mail on her, and on many other people. “He has written,” says the author of the *Mémoires secrets*, “to some rich private persons in this country, to say that he knew some very scandalous anecdotes concerning them, but he thought it but honest (!) to forewarn them, and inform them that, if they objected to see these stories in print, he was willing to spare them that annoyance,—on receipt of a certain consideration. Many accepted these terms: amongst other M. de Marigny (the brother of Madame de Pompadour).

“Morande had the audacity to write to Madame du Barry to levy contributions from her in the same manner. She complained to the Duc d’Aiguillon, and the Minister conferred with the English Ambassador, who wrote to the Court. His Britannic Majesty replied that he should make no objection if they carried off Morande, drowned him in the Thames, or stifled him in any way, provided it was done secretly, and without causing an international difficulty, for he was a pest to society, and a plague to mankind.”

It hardly seems probable that an English King—George III

above all—or his Minister would have answered in this strain, though in the present instance he would have been perfectly justified. Apparently, however, there was an implied consent given to the capture of Thevenot de Morande, and police officers, or as we should now say, detectives, were sent over to London to carry him off, or carry out the programme given above in the best way they could. Thevenot, however, was too wary an old fox to be caught in that way. He set the mob on his intending captors, whom he denounced as French spies, and it was the detectives instead of Morande who came very near being drowned in the Thames. The *fortiter in re* method was then abandoned in favour of the *suaviter in modo*, and Beaumarchais was employed to buy off the libeller, and accomplished his mission successfully as has already been narrated in the Introduction. The fact that Beaumarchais was employed by the King personally (acting through his valet, La Borde) might seem to imply that the King, by showing such anxiety to save Madame du Barry from insult and annoyance, was still, despite the rumours just noted, under the sway of the fascination of his beautiful Mistress. We fully believe that he was, but too much stress must not be laid on the point, for it is extremely probable that the selfish old monarch thought the revelations of Morande would not redound to his credit.

If Comte Mercy is correct, Madame du Barry had at this time an additional trouble, in the shape of a quarrel, or at all events a misunderstanding, with the Duc d'Aiguillon. The Minister complained that her "ineptitude," and the difficulty he had to make her understand how to act, caused him an immense deal of trouble, and that she was

exacting in her demands, and inconsiderate. No mention of anything of the kind is found in Pidansat,—to whom it would have been particularly pleasant to record it,—or in the *Mémoires secrets*, the *Nouvelles à la main*, or elsewhere. It seems not unlikely that D'Aiguillon, who was quite as *rusé* as Comte Mercy (if he ever made the statement) was desirous of deceiving the Austrian Ambassador as to the position in which he stood with regard to the favourite. The statement of Comte Mercy seems effectively disproved by the conduct of the Duc and Duchesse d'Aiguillon to Madame du Barry after the death of Louis XV, at a time when she could no longer render any services.

At this time there was current in Paris, where it was very widely read, a set of verses entitled *Épître à Margot*, supposed to be addressed by the "poet" to his mistress, a peasant girl. The public chose to see in this piece a portrait of Madame du Barry, though in reality very few of the lines were applicable to her. The author was believed to be Dorat, a writer of some facility, but he denied the production, as did also a young officer, Choderlos de Laclos, who was also suspected by some to be the author. The cause of this denial was that there was some talk about putting the lover of Margot—if he could be found—into the Bastille. Such an intention, if it ever existed, must have originated with D'Aiguillon or Maupeou (though the latter hypothesis is improbable), for Madame du Barry had looked over so many worse offences of the kind that it was not very likely she was deeply moved by a production which had no direct reference to her. If anybody wanted to put Dorat in prison it must have been D'Aiguillon, who could have had no

other motive than the wish to please Madame du Barry, but it is not unlikely that the poetaster took an exaggerated estimate of his offence, and in his self-conceit fancied he had done something worthy of the Bastille, though nobody really thought of putting him there.

* * *

Ere we describe the death of the King there is one more anecdote which deserves a passing mention for the sake of the great musician whose name is concerned therein. The *Mémoires secrets* and other trustworthy authorities of the same kind, being unable to deny that Madame du Barry often befriended artists, musicians, and literary men, have asserted that she did so merely out of jealousy to the Dauphiness, and that, if ever Marie Antoinette invited any great foreign artiste to come to Paris, or expressed any preference for the books, pictures, or music of anyone, the King's mistress at once searched about for someone to pit against him. The Dauphiness having invited her compatriot Glück to Paris—where his *Iphigenia in Aulis* had just made a great success—Madame du Barry at once sent for one of the greatest Italian musicians, Piccini, to oppose as a rival to the Michael Angelo of music.

Facts and dates refuse to bear out this theory. Glück's *Iphigenia in Aulis* was first performed in Paris on April 19, 1774. The King's last illness began on April 27, so that any action she took was in the interval of eight days between the two events, and as there was no telegraph in those days the negotiations could not have reached a very advanced stage in the time. Piccini did not arrive in Paris till the end of 1776, when he came accompanied by his wife, his eldest son, a youth of nineteen, and

his pupil, a young Englishman. It is true though that his biographer records that a proposal for the composer to visit France had been previously made through La Borde, the valet of Louis XV, and the author of an Essay on Music, but the death of the King had caused the matter to fall through. When Piccini did come to France it was in response to an invitation which Marquis Caraccioli, the Neapolitan Ambassador at Paris, "had obtained permission from the Queen" (Marie Antoinette) to send him. Jeanne du Barry was then a prisoner at Pont-aux-Dames. So much for the story. A German writer, anxious that the names of Piccini and Madame du Barry should be mixed up somehow, has gone so far as to suggest that she was once the mistress of the composer.

CHAPTER XVII

"DEATH LAYS HIS ICY HAND ON KINGS"

(1774)

LOUIS XV was now sixty-four years of age, and his constitution was worn out by debauchery and excess. He was obese, unwieldy, and scant of breath; it was quite a labour to get him on his horse or out of his carriage. The digestive functions were deranged, he could no longer take supper, and was obliged to dilute his wine with Vichy water. No organic complaint had shown itself, but he was in a condition to catch any endemic disease that was going about, and small-pox was rife at the time, not only in Paris but at Versailles. Many of the courtiers had been attacked, and several had died. The Comtesse de Provence had small-pox very shortly after her marriage. The King was quite as likely as anyone else to take the disease—perhaps even more prone than nine-tenths of the many persons at Versailles—and there is no need to describe the contagion as being a fitting punishment for a foul and disgusting offence.

Voltaire alone gives a not improbable account of how the King might have caught the disease.

"Towards the end of April, 1774, Louis XV, whilst out

hunting, met a funeral procession. His natural taste for anything that was dismal caused him to approach the coffin, and he asked who was going to be buried? He was told, a young girl who had died of the small-pox. From that moment he was stricken with death, though he was not aware of it."

The writer of the *Mémoires secrets* laughs at this account, and after having repeated it, adds, "No one here knows this story, and it is funny that the philosopher of Ferney should have heard it in his solitary abode. Apparently he did not dare to repeat the true facts, and has replaced them by the account just given." The "facts"—according to public rumour—were horrible enough, and it is not unlikely that the report had reached Voltaire, and he tried to soften it down. Honest Hardy, although "his pen almost refuses to transcribe the fearful story", recounts that the rumour ran that the King caught the disease from a "young girl of sixteen, very pretty, whom the Comtesse du Barry had procured, and who, unknowingly, carried in her breast the germs of this fatal disease, which she communicated to the King. She was herself struck by the disease the day after the King was taken ill, and was carried off in three days."

Hardy evidently did not believe, or want to believe, in a story so horrible, and Abbé Baudeau, the author of the *Chronique secrète de Paris*, did not attach much credit to it either, though he gives a much more dramatic version of the story. Pidansat de Mairobert garnishes the rumour with so many of his own obscenities that it is unquotable. It is needless to say that he and some of the others, though they differ in some essential points, agree that it was Madame du Barry who introduced the girl to the King,

and that she was therefore indirectly responsible for his death. She, or her friends, or "infamous advisers,"¹ hit upon this expedient in order to divert the mind of Louis from the religious despondency which had been induced by the stirring sermons of the Bishop of Senez.² Nothing but the ruin of a young virgin could apparently efface from the King's mind these "sad and salutary impressions."

Some of the arguments which would refute this abominable charge, must, out of respect for decency, be withheld, but enough remain to enable us to scotch the slander if not kill it. If Louis was suffering from religious despondency, it was because "the foul crimes done in his days of nature" weighed heavy on his conscience. In days when it was considered bad form not to break the Seventh Commandment methodically and regularly, his *liaisons* with De Pompadour and Du Barry were not likely to affect him deeply, but he did sometimes feel remorse, or as near it as he was capable of getting, for his "incestuous intercourse" with all the Sisters de Nesles, and for the "Parc aux Cerfs"—an abominable establishment founded by De Pompadour and promptly closed by Du Barry. To have attempted, at such a moment, to drive him back to the insipid sins of his earlier days would have been the worst policy, besides being a wholly unnecessary piece of villany. If Madame de Pompadour had possessed the health and *physique* of Madame du Barry the Parc aux Cerfs would never have existed.

But let us leave Madame du Barry and turn to the

¹ LACRETTELLE, *Histoire de France*, vol. VII. p. 341.

² The Abbé de Beauvais, appointed some four months previously.

last victim of the lust of Louis,—the martyr who so terribly avenged so many other victims. Who was she, and what was she? The questions cannot be answered. Her name is unknown and her shapes are protean. Abbé Baudeau, in recounting the anecdote, says, she was *une petite vachère* met by the King and Du Barry at Trianon, whilst she was gathering grass for her cow, but adds there were other versions of the rumour current, according to which she was the daughter of a *baker* at Versailles, the daughter of a *millier*, or the daughter of *Montvallier*, the secretary and steward of Madame du Barry. Pidansat de Mairobert says she was the daughter of a *carpenter*; Comte d'Hézeques, "the daughter of the *gardener* at Luciennes"; and Carlyle, "the once so buxom daughter of the *gatekeeper*." Hardy and Lacretelle are discreetly vague, the former calling her "a young person of sixteen," and the latter, "a young girl born of obscure parents." Amongst these seven the reader can take his choice,—or perhaps he may come to the same conclusion as the biographer of Madame du Barry, that the truth seldom varies quite so much, and not believe in any of them.

A point on which the generality of the anecdotists seem agreed is that the girl was suffering from the small-pox and communicated the disease to the King. For at least three days before small-pox declares itself, the patient suffers from depression of spirits and debility, headache, sickness, languor, pains in the back and loins, and sometimes delirium. The disease is not contagious until the pustules appear, but if the young woman had even the preliminary symptoms it is hardly possible to believe she would have been introduced to the King in that condition, nor is it altogether normal that the King should have developed

the symptoms *the next day*. Abbé Baudeau says her brother had died of small-pox, and allowing that there is any truth in the legend—which we are not inclined to admit—it would seem more likely that the King caught the disease by *infection* than by *contagion*, but in any case its development was abnormally rapid.

The chroniclers all agree that the girl herself died of small-pox, but the registers at Versailles and at Louve-ciennes contain no record of the death of a girl of the age, under the requisite conditions. The only exception is a certain Marie Louise Antoinette Panneton, buried on May 8, but no mention of the disease is made in the entry, and she is, moreover, described as the daughter of a *glazier*, and she was sixteen and a half years old,—which does not agree in either respect with any account we have.

Madame du Barry, however, is not only made indirectly responsible for the King's illness, but is held responsible for the fatal result, because, when the disease did declare itself, she refused to allow him to be moved to Versailles, and insisted that he should be attended by a doctor named by herself. All that she cared for, says La Rochefoucauld, was to keep the King away from his family, and though the invalid's room was inconveniently small, and the scandal caused by her conduct very great, she persisted in her resolve.

In the first place this is not true—perhaps it would have been better for Louis if it had been. The King did not complain of being ill until 5.0 p.m. on Tuesday, April 27, and he was taken to Versailles at 4.0 p.m. the following day. That he was not moved before was due to the fact that he was so slightly indisposed that Lemon-

nier, the King's physician, did not think it necessary to have him transported to the Palace. Louis said that he preferred his room at Trianon to any that he had ever inhabited, and he certainly stood a better chance of recovery in the light, airy and quiet residence of Trianon than in the dark, stuffy, and noisy rooms of Versailles.

Transported to Versailles, and lodged in his own rooms, he rapidly grew worse, and a fresh doctor had to be called in. Bouvard was suggested, but Madame du Barry is said to have cried, like a spoiled child, "I won't have Bouvard, I want Bordeu." That doctor was accordingly fetched, and he immediately desired to bleed the King three times,—which does not give us nowadays, a very high opinion of his talents, but in those times it was the rule, and if Bouvard had been called in, no doubt he would have done the same thing. Indeed, as far as we can judge, Madame du Barry chose the better man. She refused, however, to let him bleed the King more than twice, which shows more sense than she is credited with.

No credit can be given to the statement of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld that the favourite was so "enraged" at the King having been brought to Versailles that she shut herself in the room with him, and refused admission to any of the Royal Family. So long as any doubt existed as to the nature of the malady, Louis was visited by all the members of his family, but when the doctors declared it to be small-pox, the Dauphin, who had never had the disease, ceased his visits; Mesdames, however, nursed their father courageously, and the Duc d'Orleans was often in the sick chamber,—but Madame du Barry was not. Besenval records that on one of the first evenings of the King's illness, La Borde, the valet, was sent to fetch the Mistress

to the bed-side, but the King did not appear very pleased to see her.

The courtiers were divided in opinion as to whether the King's confessor ought to be sent for or not. Curiously enough Du Barry caused each side to take the view of the case that was opposed to its principles. The *dévots* were the friends of the Favourite, and as they knew that "enter confessor" meant "exit mistress," they were not anxious to see the priests arrive, whilst the *philosophes* being reduced to take the other alternative, had to advocate a religious form in which they did not believe.

Madame du Barry was in doubt as to what course she should pursue. She consulted the Maréchale de Mirepoix, as to whether it would not be better for her to leave the Court until the King took a change for the better. "My dear," replied the sarcastic old lady, who was an inveterate gambler, "if you leave the table you throw up the game." Not finding much consolation in this response, Madame du Barry sent for her brother-in-law, the *Roué*, and held a long consultation with him. He probably advised her to stay, for the King's condition had improved, and on Monday, May 2, he seemed much better, and was able to converse with one of the courtiers about a forthcoming election at the Academy. The Dauphiness also "allowed the people to approach the terrace"—either at Versailles or the Tuileries—"that they might hear a favourable bulletin concerning the King. It was received with cries of *Vive le Roi*, and this touching spectacle caused the Dauphiness to shed tears."

Up to this time Louis had been under the impression that his complaint was "pimpley erysipelas," but within a few more hours he became so much worse that Cardinal

Roche-Aymon was forced to tell him that his disease was really small-pox.

The King replied, "One does not get over that disease at my age." He then sent for the Duc d'Orleans and had a long conversation with him. Madame du Barry was afterwards fetched, and the King said to her, "It is time, Madame, that we should leave each other," or, according to another version, "Madame, as I am thinking of taking the sacrament, it is not fit that you should remain here, and as I do not want a repetition of the scene of Metz, arrange with the Duc d'Aiguillon for your withdrawal from Court. I have given orders that you shall want for nothing."

This latter version seems rather a long communication for a sick man to make. Madame du Barry obeyed the King immediately, and unresistingly, without any shrieks, or hysterical violence; she only cried, says Hardy. Before she left, she wrote a letter to Mesdames de France, imploring their protection, which they had the goodness to promise her.

It was Tuesday night or Wednesday morning when the King said farewell to the Favourite, and at four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon Du Barry left Versailles in the carriage of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, accompanied by the Duchesse, and (so Madame du Deffant heard) by her niece, the Vicomtesse, and Mademoiselle Françoise ("Chon") du Barry. They went to a country-house belonging to D'Aiguillon, at Rueil, three leagues from Versailles.

The Mistress being out of the way, most of the courtiers demanded that the confessor should be sent for. Old Richelieu still opposed the proposal,—offered to confess in the King's stead, and astonish Cardinal Roche-Aymon

(as no doubt he would have done) with a few of his "nice little sins," and protested against the King "being killed by a proposition in divinity." Duc de Fronsac, worthy son of Richelieu, threatened to throw the curé of Versailles out of window if he mentioned such a thing as extreme unction, to which the good priest replied, "If I am not killed I will return by the door."

Early on Friday, May 7, the King sent for the priests, received the *viaticum* from the hands of Roche-Aymon, and confessed for the space of sixteen minutes, as carefully timed by the Princes' watches. Three times during the day was the confessor recalled, to hear some details which had previously escaped recollection. After confessing, Louis whispered for some little time to the Duc d'Aiguillon, and a report circulated in Paris that he had given orders that Du Barry was to be removed to a greater distance—to Chinon in Touraine it was rumoured. A surmise as to what these instructions really were will be made later. Comte Mercy, and other well-informed persons, believed, however, that should the King recover, it was to be presumed, and still more to be feared, that the Mistress would be recalled.

Grand Almoner Roche-Aymon, on leaving the King's apartment, declared audibly—prompted by Abbé Meudon, Besenval thinks—"That the King repented of any subject of scandal he may have given, and of wrongs done to religion or to his people,"—at which old Richelieu growled out an epithet which Besenval is too modest to repeat.

Louis did not appear to be fatigued by the confession, but grew rapidly worse. "The pustules had invaded the mouth and throat." Extreme unction was given at

nine o'clock, Sunday evening (May 9), by the Bishop of Senlis, and in the afternoon of the following day¹ Louis XV closed his eyes in death, having retained consciousness till the last.

Of his character enough has already been said, and it would be useless to sermonize over the corpse of the selfish old sinner. That has been done—as he alone could do it—by Carlyle, and the present writer has no wish to seek to imitate, on his poor scrannel pipe of indifferent prose, the rolling bourdon of a great organ touched by a Master's hand.

Moralists have described with what scant ceremony the body of Louis XV was huddled underground—and have drawn their conclusions therefrom. The monks of St. Bernard watched by the corpse until the evening of the second day, when, at seven o'clock, a plain hearse, followed by three carriages, containing "noblemen of the usher species and a Versailles clerical personage," and escorted by a few mounted pages, and fifty of the "Scots Guard"—not *palefreniers* or grooms, as Carlyle states—conveyed the remains of the King to St. Denis.

Unceremonious enough the funeral was, but it is not generally known that Louis XV in his will, dated January 6, 1770, had inserted the following clause, "I forbid all great ceremonies at my funeral, and I order that my body shall be conveyed to St. Denis in the most simple manner that may be." But possibly, if Louis XV had not died of an infectious disease, his wishes regarding his funeral would not have been respected, or at least a wider construction would have been given to them.

¹ Some histories say at two o'clock, others at a quarter past three.

The "clerical person" was the curé of Versailles, who had to attend officially in order that he might make the following entry in the register of Notre Dame de Versailles,

"LOUIS XV. The year one thousand seven hundred and seventy four, the twelfth May, the body of the most high, powerful, and excellent Prince, LOUIS XV, King of France and Navarre, deceased the day before yesterday, was transferred to the Royal Abbey of the Benedictines of Saint Denis, the ordinary place of interment of the Kings of France, in the presence of, and by us the undersigned, curé

ALLART, *curé*.

VINCENOT, *priest*."

At a fast trot the body of Louis was carried, between two rows of jeering Parisians, who lined the road all the way, to St. Denis, and there placed towards midnight,— "unwept by any eye, if not by poor *Loque*, his neglected daughter's, whose Nunnery was hard by."

We would fain believe that one other woman at least, mourned for the dead King, and that his memory was honoured by the tears which fell from the beautiful blue eyes of the fair, frail, and unfortunate Jeanne du Barry.

Book the Third

EXPIATION

Nessum maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria. DANTE.

For of fortunes sharpe adversite
The worst kind of infortune is this,
A man that has been in prosperite
And it remember when it passed is.
CHAUCER.

CHAPTER I

THE FALLEN FAVOURITE

(1774)

THE career of Madame du Barry falls naturally into three periods,—her early life prior to her meeting with the King,—her few short years of guilty splendour,—and the long days of seclusion and obscurity which were the first and least punishments of her sins.

It is the last of these periods which has now to be treated. We have watched her from “her truckle-bed in Joan of Arc’s country”; we have followed her career “through the lowest subterranean depths, and over highest sunlit heights of Harlotdom and Rascaldom,” and we have now to see her retired and repentant—for the first few years at all events,—reviled by those who owed most to her, robbed by those she trusted, betrayed by those she had reared and fed. Surely, if her offences had been great, heavy was the reckoning.

To write an account of these twenty years of her life will not be a long task. Now that she was no longer in the glare of the fierce light that beats upon a throne, but few of the multitudinous memoir-writers made even a passing mention of her; with loss of power came release

from intrigue, bickerings, and chicanery. Shorn of her riches she was no longer a profitable quarry for the black-mailer, who was reduced to publish his lies, and seek from the uncertain favour of the public a recompense for his foully ingenious inventions.

Pidansat de Mairobert—grumbling at the better luck of Thevenot and wondering why no Beaumarchais is sent to buy off *his* book—hastens to publish his *Anecdotes*, muttering to himself that if he cannot make the ex-favourite pay he will make her wince. He brought out the first edition of his *Anecdotes* in 1775, and the second in 1776. That exhausted his public and he had to seek for other game, became involved in some plot or swindle—we do not know, or care, which—and cut his throat. The tears that should water our sorrow at his fate live in an onion, yet it is almost with a feeling of regret that we part from his *Anecdotes*. The spirit of lying is so potent and ineradicable in them, that one is loth to leave the amusing rascal who wrote them. He was, so far as he went, a not altogether useless hack on the highway of history, for, if he stopped and sniffed at anything, we could say with safety “that is a lie,” and if he shied, reared, or bolted in fright from any object, we could say unhesitatingly, “that is a truth.”

Whilst Louis XV lay dying, Madame du Barry was at Rueil, hoping that he might recover, and she would be recalled. Two days after the King's death she received a letter from the Duc de la Vrillière, informing her that she was to be conducted to the Abbaye du Pont-aux-Dames, and remain there during the King's pleasure. As Louis XVI was then on the throne it has very naturally

been considered that this order for the imprisonment of the mistress of his grandfather was one of the first acts of his reign. Indeed some of the anecdotists have declared that when Madame du Barry heard of the order for her arrest, she said bitterly, "What a ——— reign that begins with a *lettre de cachet*."

Some thirty years ago, however, M. Vatel in rummaging the archives preserved at the Prefecture of Police came across the "Register of the King's Orders," and there found the following entry,

9th of the month of May, 1774.

Note from the Minister.

Sieur Comte Du Barry	Taken to the Château de Vincennes.
Dame Comtesse du Barry	Taken to the Abbaye du Pont-aux-Dames.

The document is very important, as it shows that the orders emanated not from Louis XVI, but from Louis XV, for on the 9th of May the old King was still alive, and did not die till the afternoon of the following day. How it was that the order was not put in force till the 12th is not explained, or easily explainable. That the official who made the entry committed an error in transcribing the date seems hardly admissible.

Unfortunately in the Commune many documents were destroyed and those that were saved were disarranged. The register, though it is still believed to exist, cannot now be found, but there is no reason to doubt the correctness of M. Vatel's assertion. Louis XVI was an easy-going man, and though Madame du Barry was not in his

good books, it seems improbable that he should have inaugurated his reign by an order for her incarceration.

On the other hand the act was one which Louis XV was very likely to order. The whispered instructions to the Duc d'Aiguillon related to this subject, and the inference is partly borne out by an entry in the *Memoirs* of the Abbé Baudeau.

"Someone who was well-informed told me, that the Duc d'Aiguillon had caused the house, where Madame du Barry was staying at Rueil, to be guarded by gendarmes; that he had told Madame Adelaide that she (Du Barry) could not escape, and that he had informed the new King that the intention of the *late* King was that she should be placed in a *convent*, because she knew State secrets."

Pidansat also alludes to rumours that the Comtesse had *escaped* from Rueil. The use of this word (*évadée*) would seem to imply that she was under surveillance at least. It is very possible that she did not notice the date of the *lettre de cachet*, or perhaps even was not shown the document, but if she did see that the order was dated in the lifetime of the late King the blow must have been all the heavier. In any case it must have been with a sad heart that she left Rueil "in a carriage drawn by six horses," and drove through the green lanes to the Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames. Behind her came a second carriage containing two persons, one of whom was an "exempt," or inspector of police. The journey was a long one, too, for Rueil and Pont-aux-Dames are nearly forty miles apart, as the crow flies, and as a detour had to be made to avoid passing through Paris, the distance traversed could not have been short of fifty miles.

The Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames was situated four or

five miles to the south west of Meaux. It was a Benedictine convent, of fifty nuns. The regulations were strict though not austere, and none of the laxity of morals which prevailed to too great an extent at other nunneries was found at Pont-aux-Dames. It was for this reason that the convent was occasionally used as a kind of prison for ladies who had incurred the King's displeasure.

The Abbey was destroyed in the Great Revolution, and even the plan of it has been lost, but tradition lingers long amongst the peasantry in an out-of-the-way district, and not many years ago there were women living near the spot where the Abbey once stood who had heard their grandmothers speak of Madame du Barry. According to these traditions, she was confined in one of the towers which flanked the gateway of the inner quadrangle, in a bare room with white-washed walls. It is said that she wept profusely when she arrived at the convent, and that when she saw her cell, she cried, "Oh, how dull it is, and to what a place they have sent me!" Another tradition, which is, perhaps, too poetical to be true, is to the effect that upon her arrival she waited some time in the refectory, whilst her cell was being prepared, and that the nuns came in one by one and gazed at her reflection in a mirror which was opposite to her, for they might not look in the face of one who was so stained with sin. They expected to see a sort of demon, but the sad, fair face touched their hearts, and the wondrous blue eyes reminded them of the Lady of Sorrows, and there was not one who did not feel for her that pity which is akin to love.

At Versailles there was no such pity for the fallen Favourite. The courtiers rejoiced at her disgrace, and

Marie Antoinette wrote to her mother, "That *creature* is in a convent, and all who bear the odious name have been banished from the Court." Could she but have known that in a few short years she would herself stand in need of the sympathy she refused to the Royal Mistress!

Jean du Barry was not at all inclined to share the fate of his sister-in-law. In the Register of the King's Orders, "taken to the Château of Vincennes" is written opposite his name, but the order was never carried out, for the wily adventurer was far too cunning to be caught. As soon as the news of the death of Louis XV reached Paris, Comte Jean went off to consult a friend, named Goy, as to what was best to be done. This friend was reputed to possess a good deal of sound sense, and no inconsiderable amount of caustic wit. Comte Jean asked what he had better do.

"Portmanteau and post-horses," was the reply.

"What? do you advise me to fly?" cried the *Roué*.
"Have you no other advice to give me?"

"If it will please you better," was the reply, "I will alter it to this—post-horses and portmanteau."

The *Roué* took the advice, and in a few hours was rolling off towards Germany. He had a good start, and as there were no telegraphs by which a fugitive could be "headed off," made his escape successfully. In passing through one of the German petty states, he sent his servant to the French Ambassador to request him to call. The Ambassador replied by sending a servant to say he was ill, whereupon Comte Jean flew into a rage and cried, "Tell your master he is a rascal! A fortnight ago he would have given a fête in my honour."¹

¹ *La Chronique Scandaleuse*. Paris, 1788.

He had managed, however, to wring a great deal of money out of his sister-in-law, and that, combined with an aptitude for holding aces when required, served to keep him in fairly good circumstances till the guillotine was ready for him. A story is told of him that once, when he was holding the bank at the gaming rooms at Spa, he roundly accused a lady, who was playing, of cheating. One of the bystanders whispered to him that the lady was the Electress of Hanover, whereupon Jean du Barry turned to her and said,

"I beg to apologize for my mistake, Madam. You crowned heads only cheat for crowns."

The boast of Marie Antoinette that all who bore the hated name of Du Barry had been banished from Court was true to the letter. On May 12, two days after the death of Louis XV, the Duc de la Vrillière sent the following letter to the Vicomte du Barry, the son of Comte Jean,

"Monsieur le Vicomte du Barri,

"It is with much reluctance, Monsieur, that I perform the orders with which the King has entrusted me. His Majesty has charged me to inform you that you are not to appear again at Court until you receive fresh orders from him. Please acknowledge the receipt of this letter by the person who will hand it to you, in order that I may inform His Majesty that his orders have been executed. I have the honour, &c., &c."

On the same day the Duc de la Vrillière also wrote to the Vicomtesse to the same effect, but in her case this paragraph was added, "His Majesty at the same time will permit you to see your aunt at the Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames, and I am consequently writing to the Abbess

in order that you may experience no difficulty." A rather singular history attached to this letter. It fell, many years afterwards, into the hands of a collector of autographs and engravings, named Leber, who in his private catalogue described it as "A rare and curious document being the original *lettre de cachet* sent to *Madame du Barry*. It was to the bearer of this letter that the fallen Favourite replied in the way that was usual with her, 'A — fine reign that commences with a *lettre de cachet*.'" M. Leber, of course, did not know any better, and honestly believed that the letter was the one sent to the mistress of Louis XV, but it is strange that two distinguished men of letters like the Brothers de Goncourt should have allowed themselves to be misled by this very palpable error. The Leber Collection was afterwards acquired by the Rouen Municipal Library, where the letter was seen by MM. J. and E. de Goncourt, who say,

"We give here, for the first time, the *lettre de cachet* which exiled Madame du Barry to Pont-aux-Dames, from the letter signed by the Duc de la Vrillière, in the Rouen Library, Leber Collection, No. 2278. All the other *lettres de cachet* published up to now in either old or recent biographies are completely false! The aunt of Madame du Barry living in retirement at Pont-aux-Dames, and of whom mention is made in this letter, was, no doubt, Madame Quantigny, the sister of her mother.¹"

MM. de Goncourt could not have read the letter with any care or they would not have failed to notice three clear indices which show plainly enough that it was not the original *lettre de cachet* sent to Madame du Barry. In

¹ *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV*, vol. ii. p. 223.

the first place it is addressed to the *Vicomtesse* du Barry, not the *Comtesse*; next, it was highly improbable that the Duc de la Vrillière had ever heard of the sister of Anne Becu, nor was it likely that she—an obscure personage in very poor circumstances¹—should be living at the Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames: and lastly, the letter only says that the recipient is banished from Court until further orders, and the writer hopes that she will experience no difficulty in getting into the convent. For Madame du Barry the difficulty must have been how to get out.

The “Marquise” du Barry (*née* de Fumel) was also banished from Court, and she also was granted permission to go and see her sister-in-law at Pont-aux-Dames, but it is very doubtful whether the *Vicomtesse* or the *Marquise* ever availed themselves of the permission. The latter especially is hardly likely to have done so, for only three months later she and her husband obtained permission to drop the name of Du Barry and assume that of Conty d’Hargicourt, the uncle of the *Marquise*.

Madame du Barry soon became reconciled to convent life. Abbé Baudeau writes in his *Chronique secrète*, under date of May 25,

“Du Barry is quite comfortable in her convent; the nuns are delighted with her. She loads them with little presents, and will end, perhaps, by making them quite skittish.”

Writing about the same time to the *Duchesse de Choiseul*,

¹ Only a few months before this her son had been arrested for stealing a roast fowl from the shop-front of a *rotissier*. He was rescued from the police by Comte Jean du Barry, who procured for him a small post in one of the colonies.

Madame du Deffand says, "I could tell you some little anecdotes about the illustrious recluse of Pont-aux-Dames, but really it would be time and paper wasted to write or talk about her." It is a matter for regret that we do not possess these "little anecdotes," but we may infer that they pointed to the conclusion that Du Barry was contented if not happy. Had it been otherwise Madame du Deffand would doubtless have transcribed them, knowing what pleasure their perusal would give her correspondent.

One of the chief uses of adversity is said to be to enable us to pick out our true friends. Jeanne du Barry found that even in her adversity some of the persons she had assisted remained true to her, and never wavered in their attachment. Though, at first, no one was allowed to see her—for the two ladies who had permission never used it—she was not debarred from receiving letters, and Desfontaines, the secretary to her steward, Montvaltier, wrote her long letters, recounting everything that was likely to interest her, and as he was an accomplished literary man, the author of several dramatic works, his letters were well-written. In a letter written to her ten days after her arrival at Pont-aux-Dames he tells her that he has been to see her mother, whom he found very sad, and who much wished to see her daughter, and desired Desfontaines to keep her well informed as to the health of Madame du Barry. The secretary concludes by saying that he will go wherever she wishes him, and be only too happy to prove himself devoted to her interests wherever and however she may employ him.

The Abbess, also, though at first not at all inclined to look too favourably on her *pensionnaire*, was soon won over by the gentle manners and sweet face of Jeanne du

Barry, and the austere, aristocratic Abbess became quite a firm friend of the ex-mistress. There were not wanting tongues to say, or pens to write, that the gentleness and piety of the fallen favourite were mere hypocrisy, assumed to deceive the simple-minded nuns, and procure some relaxation of the convent rules,—in short that Du Barry behaved very much as some of our model prisoners in our model prisons of to-day are reported to do. If Madame du Barry had played the hypocrite, she would, as soon as she had attained her end and recovered her liberty, have left the convent and never re-entered it again. There is evidence to show that she often in subsequent years, long after her release, went to Pont-aux-Dames as a visitor, and stayed long periods. Her steward, in writing to her there, says more than once that she will on her return find such and such things accomplished, and in one of her letters she states that she has been obliged to defer her visit to Pont-aux-Dames because she had no money. ¹

The want of funds was indeed one of the earliest to come of the many troubles of Jeanne du Barry. Before she had been many weeks at Pont-aux-Dames as a prisoner, her business men and the Court jeweller were soliciting from the Duc de la Vrillière leave to see her on urgent private affairs,—which leave was at once granted. Aubert, the jeweller, was authorised to sell her parure of

¹ The passage is worth giving as a specimen of the way in which Du Barry treated the French language. "Je compte aller au Pont-aux-Dames. Il y a plus de quatre mois que je remets de semaine en semaine, mais je vous en mande la raison qui m'avait empêché d'y aller, elle subsiste toujours: je n'est point d'argent je n'en est pas prie le mois passé."

diamonds, "consisting of a stomacher, epaulettes, four rows for the waist, and the knot to loop up the dress," (*trousse queue*), for the sum of four hundred and fifty thousand livres, payable at the rate of fifty thousand livres every six months. He was also to sell a *parure* of diamonds and rubies for one hundred and fifty thousand livres, to be paid in three months. She instructed her steward to pay off all debts she owed to small tradesmen who could not afford to lose the money, and told him none of the servants was to be discharged. This very proper course of action had the effect of causing all the chief creditors to commence actions against her. As she wished to be at liberty in order to regulate her affairs, she made the usual pretext of illness and persuaded the Abbess to write to the King to solicit her release, but the only effect was to call forth a letter from the Duc de la Vrillière stating that the King would consider the matter (the usual form of refusal) and asking to be kept informed of the state of health of the Comtesse.

Life in a nunnery is uneventful, and we hear little or nothing more of Madame du Barry during the remainder of her term of imprisonment, except a few absurd rumours utterly devoid of credit, such as the story of the Prince de Ligne scaling the walls of the convent in order to visit her, or the equally trustworthy report that she had instructed her architect to build for her a miniature copy of Louveciennes just outside the walls of the Abbey.

The restrictions on her liberty were gradually relaxed, and she was allowed to take walks in the neighbourhood. A little later she appears to have had her own household, for, in November 1774, her maid and her man cook were the sponsors of an infant baptised in the neighbouring church

of Couilly. On March 25, 1775, the *Nouvelles à la main* announce that "Madame du Barry has permission to leave the convent of Pont-aux-Dames. She takes walks in the environs but returns to the Abbey to sleep. There is a rumour that she is about to purchase an estate."

The report was correct in both respects. Madame du Barry had regained her liberty, but she did not leave the Abbey till a few days later, being engaged in finding a suitable residence. She bought the Château of Saint Vrain, situated a few miles from Arpajon, and hardly more than the requisite distance from Paris, for she was still under sentence of banishment, and was not to live within ten leagues of Paris or the Court. The Château had belonged to M. François Pierre La Garde, the second son of the old lady with whom little Jeanne Becu lived for a short time as companion; it is probable therefore that Madame du Barry had visited the house some seventeen years previously. The Château still exists, and is described in topographical dictionaries, etc., as having been built by Madame du Barry, which is a mistake. She purchased it for two hundred thousand livres, and paid fifteen thousand livres for the furniture. The price was not dear considering that the Château was a handsome building with eleven windows, and five in each wing, and provided with a chapel, fore-court, stables, etc., and that the estate consisted of one hundred and sixty-five arpents (one hundred and forty acres) of land with a pretty rivulet running through, and a large lake.

M. Arsene Houssaye, the author of the article on Du Barry in the *Grande Encyclopédie*, says that she owed her release entirely to the kindness of Marie Antoinette.¹ It

¹ The article teems with errors and mis-statements. M. Houssaye was one of those numerous French writers who are always ready

is to be feared that, if Du Barry had had to await the birth of any pity or compassion in the Queen's breast, she would have ended her days at Pont-aux-Dames. Marie Antoinette hated Du Barry, the D'Aiguillons, and everybody who had belonged to the same party. The following anecdote, recounted by De Belleval, does not show Marie Antoinette in a very amiable light. The date is May 30, about six weeks after Du Barry had taken possession of her new residence.

"The Duc d'Aiguillon told me that, some days before, when he went to pay his respects to the Queen and receive her orders before the general review, he was received in a manner which showed how she hated him, and she was even so carried away by rage that she said that 'he would have done better to go to Saint Vrain to receive the orders of Madame du Barry than to come to Versailles to take hers.'"

It is almost a matter for surprise that she did not extend her animosity to M. de Maurepas, the uncle of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon. He was the chief Minister of Louis XVI, occupied the rooms in the Palace in which Madame du Barry had formerly lived, and was the means of procuring the release of the fallen Favourite.

to sacrifice truth for the sake of an epigram. He fails ever in this poor ambition, and only succeeds in being brutal where he wishes to be smart.

CHAPTER II

A GRIEF, AND A CONSOLATION

(1775—1778)

At Saint Vrain Madame du Barry inaugurated her return to liberty by giving balls, receptions, and various other entertainments. She spent a great deal of money on her pleasures, for habits of that sort once acquired are not easily lost, but she did not forget her poorer neighbours. All the poor were relieved; bread, meat, and wood were distributed to all the necessitous, and the children of the village profited by her extensive assortment of cast-off clothing. The villagers were often invited to dance in the park, and in short Du Barry played the part of Lady Bountiful to perfection.

She also founded two scholarships at a School of Art for workmen, which M. de Sartines, the ex-chief of the police, had established in Paris. The deed is dated Sept. 21.

On the same day Madame du Barry gave a very striking and practical proof of her affection for her mother. Madame Ranson had lately left the convent of St. Elisabeth, where she had been living under the name of Madame de Montrabé, and was residing with her husband—who perhaps had just returned to Paris—in lodg-

ings. They were in financial difficulties, and fell into the hands of a money-lender, whom they were unable to pay, and who cited them before the Châtelet. Jeanne du Barry resolved to rescue her mother from these straits, and commissioned one of her agents to purchase a house at Villiers-sur-Orge for fifty-three thousand francs, and presented this comfortable residence, which had about thirty acres of land attached to it, to her mother and her step-father. The Ransons were enabled to live henceforth in comfort, to keep their carriage, and even to boast of "a service of plate." Many more virtuous people have done much less for their relations.

The purchase of these two properties had presumably made rather a heavy call on Madame du Barry's purse, for six months later we find her selling her residence at Versailles to the Comte de Provence, the King's brother. Perhaps it was with a view to facilitate the transfer of this property that she was allowed to revisit Louveciennes and stay there a few days (Oct. 1775), the Court being then at Fontainebleau.

Any satisfaction that she felt at this alleviation of her banishment must have been considerably dashed by the appearance this same month of the *Anecdotes*—a book to which constant reference has been made in the present volume. It was printed at London, and copies were imported into France *via* Amsterdam, in spite of the vigilance of the police, who had been instructed by the Minister of the King's Household to seize the work—probably out of regard to the memory of the late King. Two hundred copies were seized, but many others escaped confiscation, and were soon in the hands of all those who cared to peruse this precious production. The book

was also discreetly puffed by means of occasional paragraphs in the papers,—paragraphs which it is not unlikely Pidansat de Mairobert wrote himself. We have already had occasion to point out scores of instances of the lies, gross as the father which begot them, which abound in this “*cloaca* of a book” as Carlyle would have called it. More nauseous rubbish was never penned, and indeed were it not for the moral satisfaction to be derived from the knowledge that the author cut his throat and perished miserably, it would be almost impossible for any rational being to peruse the *Anecdotes*. Unfortunately his ingenious lies have been taken for gospel by at least three generations of historians, and in spite of all the literary grace of the De Goncourts, and the patient research of M. Vatel, there is reason to fear that the name of Jeanne du Barry will always be regarded by the bulk of the public as a synonym for all the depravity, profligacy, and vice of which a woman is capable,—the heroine of a thousand crimes without one trace of a redeeming virtue.

* * *

The winter of 1775-76 was an exceptionally rigorous one, and for some weeks Madame du Barry was snowed up at St. Vrain. She appears, however, to have had company. Her old companion, Françoise du Barry (Chon), was staying with her, and so was a certain Vicomte de Langle, an old soldier—he was then fifty-nine—who, it is believed, would not have been averse to marrying the ancient mistress of Louis XV, who still had an income of a hundred thousand francs a year, besides being remarkably beautiful.

A favourite amusement of Du Barry was a game called *Trou-madame* which appears to have somewhat resembled

bagatelle, but the number of holes was greater, and some of the balls were made of lead and some of ivory. The balls were thrown also, and not pushed with a cue. The ex-favourite considered herself very skilful at this amusement, and apparently was accustomed to back herself to put in nine balls out of nineteen every time.

More than probably the Vicomte was a fortune-hunter, though he denies the imputation in a curious document still preserved in the Archives. Therein he defends himself from three charges which have been brought against him. The first was that he had demanded from Madame du Barry ninety thousand francs, which he had won of her in bets; the second that he had been in love with, and jealous of her, and the third that to revenge himself on her (for refusing him?) he had given an account of her conduct to the Duc de Choiseul, who was always anxious to hear any evil reports concerning his old enemy.

In defending himself against these charges the Vicomte says that he obtained an introduction to Madame du Barry from the Duchesse de ——¹ under pretext that he wished to purchase the estate, and she invited him to stay at her house. He owns that the more he knew of her, the more interested he became in her fate, and that he thought it scandalous that she should be condemned to live in that wretched country-house. So dull was she—according to his account—that she was driven to gambling as a relief from *ennui*, and on one occasion he won from her a million and a half francs. “She was the only person uneasy at this heavy loss, for the bystanders were sure that I

¹ Possibly D'Aiguillon; the name is left blank in the original document.

should go on doubling the stakes until she won the whole back at one *coup*, which was precisely what happened." Another occasion when the gallant Vicomte laid against the favourite was the night before she left Saint Vrain for Louveciennes, when "to dissipate the *ennui* caused by the commotion of a general moving"—a strange time to feel *ennui* one would think—she proposed a game at *trou-madame* for sixpence, lost, and went on increasing the stakes and losing, until the Vicomte had won ninety thousand francs. The gallant Vicomte was, however, "an old soldier" in both senses of the term, and had not given up all hopes of becoming possessor of the "*abominable campagne*" with its fair *châtelaine* as well, so he judged it best to declare the bets "off," and refused to accept anything but a paltry thousand francs for a young woman, a *protégée* of his, for whom he wished to find a place in Madame du Barry's household.

As for informing the Duc de Choiseul of all that Madame du Barry did, the Vicomte declares that he never met the Duc but once, when the following conversation took place,

"You often go to see Madame du Barry?—Yes, M. le Duc.—She has kept all her servants?—Yes, M. le Duc.—Her servants get up private theatricals?—Yes, M. le Duc.—But she must have a fairly large fortune to support all that expense?—I believe so, M. le Duc.—Adieu, M. de Langle.—Your servant, M. le Duc."

The Vicomte would perhaps have been successfully "drawn" by the diplomat if he had had anything to tell, but the life of Madame du Barry at Saint Vrain was uneventful and, very possibly, dull. It only lasted a year and a half, however, for on November 15, 1776, the

Nouvelles à la main announce that she was free to visit Paris and Louveciennes whenever she liked, but—as it was always necessary to find a bad motive for any action in which Du Barry was concerned—they add that the Comte d'Artois had procured for her this privilege because he was desirous of succeeding his grandfather in the good graces of the Du Barry! The suggestion is worthy of Pidansat de Mairobert, and it is not altogether impossible that he was the author of it.

By the end of October, or beginning of November, Du Barry was back at Louveciennes, but, of course, her life there was very different from what it had been in the days of the last King. She gave no balls or receptions, and was careful not to give the least chance to scandal-mongers. She never visited Versailles; indeed it is very doubtful whether she would have been permitted to do so if she had wished. Probably few of her former friends ever troubled to come and see her, but she had at least one distinguished visitor, who did not care what the King and Queen thought of his conduct. Joseph II, Emperor of Germany, son of Maria Theresa, and brother of Marie Antoinette, was, in the spring of 1777, travelling through Europe, under the name of Count Falckenstein. In due time he came to France to visit his sister and brother-in-law, and being a liberal-minded monarch, anxious to promote the material welfare of his subjects, spent some time in inspecting factories, museums, etc. One day he started off on foot, and almost unattended, to inspect the celebrated hydraulic machine at Marly, which, as we know, was close to the residence of the ex-favourite. He had been careful to ascertain that Madame du Barry would be at home that day. After leaving Marly he suddenly

noticed the Pavilion of Louveciennes, affected to admire it immensely, and expressed a wish to visit it. He was received by Madame du Barry, with whom he conversed for fully two hours. When the Comtesse was about to show him the gardens he offered her his arm, but she declared herself unworthy of such an honour. "Raise no objections on that score," he is reported to have said, "Beauty is always Queen." But after he left he remarked that he was very glad to have seen Madame du Barry, but did not find her as beautiful as he had expected.

He doubtless had a bad quarter of an hour when he got back to Versailles, and related in his blunt, unaffected way the story of his visit, and spoke in very complimentary terms of the "*belle recluse*." Poor old Comte Mercy d'Argenteau, who had hoped that he had done with Du Barry for ever, was obliged to relate the incident to Maria Theresa. He rather toned it down, said that His Majesty had met the Comtesse in the garden and had a few moments' conversation with her, "and found the said Comtesse such as I have depicted her,"—forgetting perhaps that he had always depicted her in rather too favourable a light. Maria Theresa replied, "I should have been better satisfied if the Emperor had refrained from visiting the despicable Du Barry."

The Emperor further annoyed his sister by refusing to pass through Lorraine and visit the Choiseuls, and capped all his former offences by telling Louis XVI, in the presence of Marie Antoinette, "That it was a good job he (Louis) had a wise and calm Minister at the beginning of his reign, for if the Duc de Choiseul had been in office, his turbulent, unquiet spirit would have thrown the affairs of the nation into confusion." The King quite agreed

with the sentiment, but the Queen was much annoyed, and afterwards took her brother to task for having spoken so disrespectfully of the Duc de Choiseul.

Poor Madame du Barry was fated never to escape the tongue of slander. In June, 1777, some worthy follower of Pidansat de Mairobert announced that she had given birth to a son. "Nature," he added, "sometimes shows an objectionable superabundance in the reproduction of venomous plants." The observation was more true than the writer was aware of. Another chronicler, of the same kidney, was sure that the child was a girl, and Du Barry did not know who was the father. "She contented herself with giving her a hundred thousand francs and marrying her to a poor gentleman, whose son is now in Russia under the name of the Marquis de Boissaison." The daughter appears to have grown up in a few hours, like the children of the houris in the Mohammedan paradise.

A sculptor, named Allegrain, showed this year at his studio—for the statue was too heavy to be transported to the Salon—a "Diana surprised at the bath by Acteon," which was bought by Du Barry. It has been averred that she stood for the figure, or the head, or both. Possibly she may have done so, for the figure is not at all that of the typical idea of Diana, and the celebrated courtesan would have made but an indifferent model for the Goddess of Chastity, but the figure is graceful and pretty, and is one of the most noticeable works in the Modern Sculpture Room of the Louvre.

Voltaire returned to Paris in 1778, after an absence of more than twenty years. Eight or nine days after his

arrival (Feb. 20) Madame du Barry came to call upon him. The old philosopher was not quite sure whether he ought to receive her. In the first place she was not in favour, and secondly he was only half dressed, but after some little hesitation he permitted her to enter. What passed between them we do not know, but the close of the interview was marked by a noteworthy incident. There was then in Paris a young man who was anxious to show to Voltaire the manuscript of a work he had written. He went to the lodgings of the great man, but at the last moment his heart failed him, and he ran away. He returned the next day, mounted the stairs, and—scuttled precipitately down again on seeing the door open and a lady emerge. He looked at the lady, and saw that she was not only beautiful, but that kindness and sympathy shone in her fair face. There was something in her look that inspired confidence, and he told her his mission and asked her if she could help him to see the Master. “Monsieur Voltaire does not receive to day,” she replied, “but I will ask him as a personal favour to see you.” She ran lightly up the stairs, knocked at the door, and in a few moments obtained permission for her new-found *protégé* to present himself. The young man thanked her warmly, and she replied with a sweet smile that won his heart.

The old literary giant read a few pages of the manuscript, and saw that it was no ordinary stuff, but the work of a man who would one day make his mark. The book was the *Théorie des Lois criminelles*, and the young author was Jean Pierre Brissot, afterwards the leader of the Girondist party. As he and Du Barry stood and talked in the hall of Voltaire’s house they little dreamed that both their heads would fall under the same knife.

The summer of 1788 was extremely hot, and no rain fell during July and August. The Queen was then pregnant, and, as she did not wish to show herself in public in that condition, she kept her room during the day, but was accustomed to take walks in the Park after nightfall. Of course, whatever the Queen did, the courtiers did, and it became fashionable to stroll about the terraces and park of Versailles from 11.0 p.m. till 2.0 or 3.0. a.m. The custom gave rise to a great deal of scandal. Some of the couples wandered away into secluded spots, and the tongue of slander did not even spare the Queen herself. Comte Mercy in his letters confesses that the fashion was not very seemly, but solaced himself with the reflection that it would come to an end when the fine weather did. The practice did not take its origin in the fact that the Queen did not like to show herself whilst she was *enceinte*—for these midnight promenades had commenced in 1777, and were renewed in 1779, some months after the Queen had been confined.

Allusion is made by several historians (amongst others, Carlyle) to the rumour that, on one occasion at least, Madame du Barry was seen flitting like a night-bird of ill-omen amongst the company on the terrace. There is nothing improbable in the supposition that she might have wished to revisit the scenes of her former glory, and have availed herself of such a favourable opportunity, but there is no better authority for the statement that she really did so than a surmise of Madame de Campan, who possessed a lively imagination, and did not always see things quite as they were. Indeed, in this instance she seems to have invented the story in order to induce the Queen to abandon a custom which was creating a

scandal "not only in Paris or in France, but even in Europe." Madame de Campan, after asserting that nothing could have been more innocent than this amusement of the Queen, and alluding to the calumnious reports, adds,

"I ventured to represent this to the Queen, assuring her that one night when she made me a sign that she wished to speak to me, I had seen, close to the bench where she was sitting, two women, closely veiled, and silent, and that these women were the Comtesse du Barry and her sister-in-law, and that I was convinced of this on meeting, only a few yards from the bench, a tall lackey whom I had seen in the service of Madame du Barry, when she was still at the Court."

The evidence that the two women were Jeanne and Françoise du Barry is not very conclusive, for it is difficult to recognise, especially at night, two persons closely veiled who do not speak, and though Madame du Barry, when she was sent into exile, gave orders that none of her servants was to be discharged, it does not follow that the tall lackey had not quitted her of his own accord, and taken service with some lady of the Court. But if the story was invented to induce Marie Antoinette to desist from these nocturnal rambles, the choice of Madame du Barry as a convenient "bogey" was the best that could have been made under the circumstances.

Another sorrow fell upon Jeanne du Barry before the conclusion of this year (1778),—the death of her nephew Vicomte Adolphe du Barry, the son of the *Roué*, who was killed in a duel.

In the summer of this year, Adolphe du Barry—who was banished from the Court of Versailles on account

of the name he bore—went to Spa with his wife and her sister, Sophie de Tournon. There they made the acquaintance of an Irishman, Count Rice, who, like the Vicomte and everybody else who made any claim to be considered a fine gentleman in those days, was an inveterate gamester. The two men became intimate friends and a partnership, or perhaps it would be more proper to say a confederacy, seems to have existed between them.

The Irishman persuaded young Du Barry to visit Bath, and the party crossed the Channel. They arrived at Bath, where they took a furnished house in Royal Crescent, gave good suppers, and doubtless plucked many a pigeon. The partnership, though profitable, was brief, for one night after supper, Count Rice and the Vicomte had a quarrel, most probably about the division of the spoil, though nothing definite is known on the subject, for the two men were alone at the time. At any rate a duel to the death was arranged. Vicomte Adolphe spent the next day in putting his affairs in order, finding a surgeon, seconds, etc. Only two seconds, a Mr. Toole, and Mr. Rogers are mentioned, so possibly there was only one second for each "principal." At one o'clock in the morning of the second day, the party started in a post-chaise and four and drove to Claverton Downs, the place where the gentlemen of Bath usually settled their little differences. Not one of the least dramatic incidents of this strange duel is, that the two men who were about to try to murder each other, had to sit together in the coach for several hours, waiting for the day to break. At length, in the cold gray of the November morning, the distances were measured, and the combatants were set in their places.

Each had a brace of pistols and a sword. On the signal being given, Vicomte du Barry fired first, and lodged a ball, which penetrated to the bone, in the thigh of his adversary. Count Rice, who, as might have been expected of an Irish gambler, had "been out" often before, managed to keep his feet and fire both pistols. His second ball struck the Vicomte in the breast, and the unfortunate young Du Barry fell dead, shot through the heart.

Messrs. Toole and Rogers, finding that the Frenchman was past all surgery, turned their attention to their compatriot, and conveyed him back to Bath with all speed. The Vicomtesse was informed of her husband's death, but she was a cold, heartless woman, and took no steps to have the body brought home. The corpse of the unhappy man lay where it fell, until the next day! Then it was placed in a coffin and taken to the Bathampton Cemetery where it was interred. Over the grave was placed a stone on which may still be read, though with some difficulty—"Here rest the remains of John Baptist Viscount du Barry obiit 18 November 1778."

It is said that the hilt of his sword was, a few years ago, and perhaps may be still, used as the handle of the Corporation Seal of the City of Bath.¹

Count Rice's wound was a severe one, and it was some months before he recovered. He was tried for homicide at Taunton Assizes, in April, 1779. He took upon himself the whole blame of this "unfortunate affair," spoke in the highest terms of the deceased Vicomte, and regretted that a quarrel should ever have arisen between himself and

¹ See Note B, at end of volume.

his friend, and claimed that he had acted in self-defence. He was acquitted and lived many years after. He was eventually killed in the Peninsula War in 1808.

The Vicomtesse du Barry returned to France, obtained the royal permission to assume her maiden name, and showed herself at Court a few weeks after her husband's death. A few months later she married her cousin, but lost her second husband some three years afterwards, and did not survive him more than a few months.

After the death of Louis XV, Madame du Barry appears to have led an exemplary life for some years. For the first two years, at least, this was compulsory, for no lover could have forced his way into the cloistered seclusion of Pont-aux-Dames, and indeed, had she been at liberty, it is scarcely likely that the image of the late King would have been so quickly effaced from her heart. Nor is there any reason to believe that she led an irregular life at Saint Vrain, though more than one suitor was anxious to win her heart. After her return to Louveciennes it would appear, however, that she did not long remain obdurate, and in 1779 or 1780 she appears to have *liaisons* with two lovers.

The first of these was an Englishman, Henry Seymour. MM. de Goncourt describe him as a Peer, and English Ambassador to France. M. Vatel is not much more correct. He states that Seymour was a rather great personage, belonged to a good family, was the nephew of the Duke of Somerset, and though neither a lord, an ambassador, nor even a "baronnet," was at least a Count. The lover of Madame du Barry did not even bear a "courtesy" title. He was Henry Seymour Esquire of Redland Court,

Gloucester, Northbrook, Devon, etc., and was at one time a Member of Parliament. At the time he made the acquaintance of Madame du Barry he must have been fifty years of age, for he was born in 1729. He had been twice married; first in 1753 to a daughter of Lord G. Cowper, by whom he had two daughters, Caroline and Georgiana; and secondly, in 1775, to Louise, Comtesse de Ponthou. Possibly it was to gratify his second wife that he resided in France, and bought a pretty little château at Prunay, between Port Marly and Louveciennes.

He must have seen Madame du Barry soon after her return to Louveciennes in 1776, but he had then been married only twelvemonths, and even the beauty of Madame du Barry could not have drawn him from his wife's side. It was, most likely, in 1779 that the intimacy began—and ended—for it does not seem to have lasted long, and probably we should never have heard of its existence if it had not been that the letters addressed by Madame du Barry to her lover were preserved by him, and eventually found their way to some autograph collector, and at the sale of his collection were communicated to the Brothers de Goncourt by M. François Barrière.

Of these letters there are but eight, apparently all that passed, for they comprise the three phases of a passing passion, commencing with mere expressions of friendliness, becoming gradually warmer, and ending with reproaches when the lover became cold. None of the letters bears any date except the day of the week. In the first, Madame du Barry regrets that Seymour's daughter is ill, and is glad that the invalid was pleased with a little dog which Madame du Barry had given her. "Cornichon"—a little boy, the son of one of the Louveciennes gardeners, whom

Madame du Barry often took with her when she went for drives—she tells Mr. Seymour, “had not ceased to talk about him.” The second letter is in much the same strain. She sends with it an old coin of Louis XIV, which Seymour had noticed on the occasion of a visit to Louveciennes, when he saw it used as a counter in a game of lotto; assures him that her sister-in-law and herself will find other “ocations” to prove their friendship; and talks about a puppy which Seymour had given her. The third note though shorter is much warmer. She has not seen him for two days,—a period which “her heart found very long,” and expects him on Saturday with the impatience of a soul devoted entirely to him. In the fourth she tells him that her heart is his entirely, and she can think of no one else; that she loves him, and hopes to be happy in his love; sends a thousand kisses and concludes with an invitation to “come early.”

When the fifth was written the gentleman’s passion had begun to cool. She would reproach him if her heart would allow her to do so, but she is so tired—having written four long letters—that she has only the strength to tell him she loves him. He is assured that “whatever he may be told” he alone has her heart. The sixth letter consists of but three or four lines to say that she is unhappy when she does not see him. In the seventh she states she is not going to Paris, because the person she had to see came to her on Tuesday, just after Seymour left. “The visit embarrassed me a great deal,” she says, “for I believe you were the object of it.” Her heart can never be another’s “in spite of his unjust suspicions,” and she thinks of him only, and regrets that she cannot tell him so every instant.

Before the eighth and last letter the "unjust suspicions" had been confirmed, or Henry Seymour had reflected that domestic trouble might arise if his wife discovered the *liaison*. At any rate he had been anxious to break off the intimacy; Madame du Barry was not of the age nor disposition to die of a broken heart, but she felt keenly the defection of a lover she had deeply adored. But as she tells him in this last letter her head is untouched if her heart suffers, and she perceives, though she does not say so in plain language, that Seymour was merely a selfish admirer, whose vanity was tickled to think that he had won the heart of such a celebrated personage as the Du Barry, but who was not so deeply infatuated but that he could feel the dangers, or at least the inconveniences, of his position.¹

The few brief letters of this one-sided correspondence show us, however, Jeanne du Barry in a new light. She is no longer the courtesan, heartless, mercenary and extravagant like most of her calling, but "a very woman," coquettish, anxious, excitable as a school-girl, timid, almost modest, when she addresses her lover,—quiet and dignified when the inevitable rupture comes. The one touch of nature has been supplied by the love affair with the handsome Englishman, and we see Jeanne du Barry was very much what other women—whether they are chaste or not—have been, and are.

¹ See Note C, at end of volume.

CHAPTER III

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHATELAIN

(1779—1788)

THE second lover of Madame du Barry, who was destined to take the place of the faithless Henry Seymour, was Louis Hercule Timoléon de Brissac, son of the Duc de Brissac. The father of Louis Hercule Timoléon was a gallant officer, who had taken a share in many a hard-fought battle, became Maréchal of France and at eighty years of age was still alert and vigorous. He often attended the Court at Versailles, but would always wear the costume which had been in fashion when he was a young man, which, says Madame Lebrun, made him look like a courtier of the time of Louis XIV come to life again. He died October 17, 1780, aged eighty-two.

He was succeeded in his title by his second son, the eldest son having been dead many years. At the funeral of the old Maréchal, Hercule Timoléon was chief mourner, and scandalized a number of persons (says Hardy in his Journal) by staring at all the women through an eye-glass with "misplaced affectation," instead of showing the gravity and modesty which the occasion required.

By a very singular error MM. Edward and Jules de

Goncourt have made confusion between the father and son, and seem to imagine that it was the old Maréchal who was the lover of Du Barry. She was certainly not likely to choose an octogenarian for her lover.

Louis Hercule Timoléon was born February 14, 1734. His acquaintance with Du Barry was of long standing, and dated at least from 1770, and possibly earlier. As Captain of the Hundred Swiss, it was necessary for him to be near the King, and in 1770 we find that he occupied the room above that of Madame du Barry. When the acquaintance developed into an intimacy it would be difficult to say, but it was probably somewhere about 1779. Possibly chagrin at the loss of Henry Seymour, may have driven Du Barry into the arms of De Brissac, but, from a passage in one of her letters to Seymour, it may be inferred that De Brissac was at that time jealous of his rival, and had paid an unexpected visit to Louveciennes in the hope of catching Seymour and Du Barry together. At his father's funeral in 1780 he is described by Hardy as ogling all the women he met, but in 1783 the *Nouvelles à la main* speak of Du Barry as the avowed mistress of the Duc de Brissac, and hint that the *liaison* was not a new one.

One veracious writer is sure that the ex-mistress has had a son by the Duc, and even honest Hardy sets down in his notes that her extravagance had nearly ruined her noble lover. Most of the writers agree that the affair would end in Madame du Barry being sent back to Pont-aux-Dames.

In 1782 Madame du Barry went to visit De Brissac in Normandy. A camp was established at Vassieux, near Bayeux, and some sham fights were got up for her amusement. The Regiment of Condé also gave a ball in her

honour. Her brother-in-law, the so-called Marquis du Barry, was brigadier at the camp.

The attentions of the officers must have put her in mind of those days when a regiment saluted her, and the colonel was severely reprimanded by the Duc de Choiseul. Memories of old times must have recurred to her mind when De Belleval,—the “light-horseman” from whose amusing *Souvenirs* several extracts have been given in the course of this volume,—called upon her. His account of his visit is interesting, and makes us wish that his book contained more such pictures as this, and the pardoning of Carpentier.

“In 1783, during a journey I made to Paris, I went to see Madame du Barry at Luciennes, where she has permission to reside. She lives almost in retirement, and is scarcely visited except by a few persons of quality who look upon her as a curious relic of the last reign. It was not like that at Versailles, where one could get at her without any difficulty. She was nearing her fortieth birthday then, and was as beautiful as she was in 1769. Her beauty seemed even to be more remarkable and more perfect. It was eight years since I had seen her, but I had no need to name myself, and she addressed me as she formerly used with, ‘Ah, my light-horseman,’ but instead of the laughter of former days, the tears welled from her eyes; I recalled to her the past, and all that she had lost. She asked about my position, which had improved, felicitated me thereon, and added, ‘I can no longer ask you what I can do for you. I think you were wrong to always refuse; but you have in the Duc de Penthièvre a better protector than I should have been. He is a worthy and excellent Prince.’

"What I would not tell her, though I inwardly prided myself upon it, was that I never wished, even had I to remain a light-horseman all my life, to owe promotion or pensions to the King's Mistress. She harped always on the past, in which, I noticed, she took refuge as much as possible, for it was worth more to her than the present. When I left she gave me her hand, and said, Adieu, in a voice full of feeling. I went away with the impression that I had paid off my debt to her for the Carpentier affair. I have never since been to Louveciennes.¹"

So far from standing in any danger of being sent to the Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames again, Madame du Barry about this time received what was in appearance a handsome present from the King or the Minister of Finance. An entry in the "Red Book" under the dates of April 22 and 23, 1784, shows that a million and a quarter francs (fifty thousand pounds) was paid to the "Comtesse" in return for an equal amount of four per cent. stock made over to the King. The name of Du Barry is not mentioned, but M. Vatel has been able to find out from the books of the successor of the notary Lepot that "the Comtesse" was Du Barry. She enjoyed a pension of fifty thousand francs a year (two thousand pounds), derived from the *Aides et Gabelles*, and she commuted this pension for a cash payment. M. Vatel, though generally over-tender towards Madame du Barry, inveighs against this "senseless munificence," and says that she received "at least half a million francs too much." Certainly if it was an annuity which terminated with her life, it was, according to the tables, worth about sixteen years' purchase, or some

¹ *Souvenirs d'un cheval-léger*, page 136.

eight hundred thousand francs, or four hundred and fifty thousand less than the sum she received. But was it an annuity, or did she merely hold a certain amount of Government stock which was redeemed "at par"?

The latter hypothesis seems the more likely. Louis XVI was not prone to liberality, and Madame du Barry was the last person in the world to whom he would have presented some eighteen thousand pounds. Moreover, in the deed it is shown that, to preserve secrecy in the transaction, Madame du Barry made over the money to a Maître Rouen, a notary, who accordingly figures in the deed as the holder of ten lots of stock each of one hundred and twenty thousand francs, each bearing five thousand francs interest.

No sooner did it become known that Madame du Barry had received a large sum of money, than creditors came in clouds, and some of the claims were not small ones either. When Vicomte Adolphe du Barry married Mademoiselle de Tournon, Madame du Barry promised the young couple a dowry of two hundred thousand francs, and she had paid the interest on this sum regularly. The Vicomte was dead and the lady had married again. Her second husband claimed his wife's *dot*, and compelled Madame du Barry to lodge the principal in the hands of the Treasurer of the Province of Languedoc. This must have been galling to the ex-mistress, for the first act of the widow of Vicomte Adolphe, after her husband's death, was to have the Du Barry arms removed from the carriages, plate, etc., and almost her next act was to petition Louis XVI to allow her to assume her maiden name. Comte Jean du Barry tried to prevent her doing this, and when other means failed attacked her in a pamphlet, to

which she replied that when she married she was unaware of the position occupied by Madame du Barry, but having discovered the truth she could no longer bear the same name as a harlot! Her disgust did not prevent her putting in a claim for the harlot's money. Indeed, the questions concerning this marriage portion were not finally settled till nearly forty years after Madame du Barry's death.

Duc d'Aiguillon also claimed two hundred and twenty-seven thousand,—repayment of a loan which he had procured for her from an obliging friend, named Binet de Beaupré, who was, in all probability no other than D'Aiguillon himself, and doubtless, though the transaction was supposed to be secret, many of her old tradespeople heard the news and applied for a share of the money.

During the remainder of 1784, and all 1785, the life of Madame du Barry appears to have been unmarked by any incident of importance. We have, however, an excellent pen portrait of her, which we know from internal evidence must relate to this period. The author was Comte Dufort de Cheverny, who had been "introducer of ambassadors" during the latter years of Louis XV, and therefore must have known Du Barry in the days of her splendour. He had the good luck to live through the Revolution without being denounced, and about 1795 wrote his *Memoirs*, the MS. of which was never printed and is now in the Public Library at Blois. In it there is an interesting account of a dinner given by Don Olavides de Pilos, to which Madame du Barry was especially invited by the Don, at the request of his friends.

Don Olavides de Pilos was a Spanish gentleman who

had had a most extraordinary career. Perhaps Madame du Barry loved this elderly Othello (he was then about sixty) for the dangers he had passed, for he was one of the very few men who had escaped out of the clutches of the Spanish Inquisition, but at all events she was known to have a great respect and admiration for him, and it was certain that she would not refuse any invitation that came from him.

Whilst we are waiting for the chief guest to arrive, it would not be amiss to say a few words about the host. He was a Spaniard of good family, and, owing to some bold, and lucky, speculations, enormously rich. The Holy Office had always found it more profitable to toast a rich heretic than a poor one, and when it became known to the officers of the Inquisition that Don Olavides had been seen reading Rousseau, and that some of Voltaire's tragedies had been performed in his salons, his doom was virtually sealed. In November, 1776, he was arrested and cast into prison, the charges against him being that he had refused to allow the tocsin to be rung during an epidemic, and that he had approved of, if he had not co-operated in, the expulsion of the Jesuits.

Clad in a picturesquely unpleasant dress of yellow serge, and holding a green candle in his hand, he was brought before the tribunal of the Inquisition, and adjudged to be a heretic. With great difficulty he saved himself from the stake, but his punishment was a severe one. He was to be confined eight years in a monastery, subject to the most rigorous discipline,—fasting, constant prayers, etc.: to be exiled for the remainder of his life to some spot twenty leagues from any royal palace, or great city; never to hold any office, or enjoy any title; never to ride on

a horse or in a coach; not to wear cloth, silk, or velvet, but to dress always in yellow serge; and finally to make a solemn recantation of his errors, and confession of his faults, "without prejudice to the confiscation of all his goods!!"

This semi-barbarous, and wholly idiotic, sentence was carried out, but in three or four years the health of Don Olavides broke down, and he obtained permission to visit some medicinal springs in Catalonia. Taking advantage of a favourable opportunity, he escaped into France, where he was welcomed as a martyr and made much of by Philosophedom. The Spanish Government demanded his extradition, but Louis XVI, though a bit of a bigot, replied that he had not committed any act which could be regarded in France as a crime, and Don Olavides resided quietly in Paris, and, says Grimm, "forgot his misfortunes amidst our theatres, our philosophers, our Aspasias, and sometimes our Phrynes."

Madame du Barry had for this victim of priestcraft "a marked respect,"—according to Comte Dufort de Cheverny—"and was, so to speak, at his orders."

"On the day appointed it froze hard enough to break a stone. She came alone, in a carriage drawn by six horses, and entered the room with an easy and noble bearing. She was tall, extremely well made, and, in short, a very pretty woman in every respect. At the end of a quarter of an hour she was as much at home with us as we were with her. My wife was the only other lady present. Madame du Barry paid marked attention to my wife, and to the master of the house, but was genial and amiable to all the rest. President de Salaberry, his nephew the Chevalier de Pontgibault, and many others

were present. She bore the brunt of the conversation, talked about Luciennes, and invited us all to dine with her. * * * Her pretty face became slightly flushed. She told us that she took a cold bath every day. She showed us that under her furred gown she wore nothing but a light *peignoir*, and a chemise of the finest batiste I have ever seen. She insisted that we should feel her petticoats that we might see how little she cared for the cold. The dinner was delightful. She told us a hundred anecdotes, in her own style, which was delightful, about Versailles. Seeing that Pontgibault wore the Order of Cincinnatus, she told us the following story. 'When I was at Versailles, I had the six tallest and best looking footmen that could be found, but the noisiest, laziest rascals that ever lived. The ring-leader of them gave me so much trouble that I was obliged to send him away. The war in America was then beginning, and he asked for letters of recommendation. I gave them, and he left me with a well-filled purse, and I was glad to get rid of him. A year ago he came to see me, and he was wearing the Order of Cincinnatus.' We all laughed at the story, except the Chevalier de Pontgibault.

"After dinner the conversation was more serious. * * * She spoke frankly and pleasantly about the Duc de Choiseul, and regretted that she had not been on friendly terms with him, though she had tried her hardest, and would no doubt have succeeded had it not been for his sister, the Duchesse de Gramont. She complained of no one, and was not spiteful."

Comte Cheverny told her how he had tried to procure a certain post for one of his friends through the good offices of La Borde, the King's valet. "Why did you not come

to me?" cried Du Barry. "Did you think that in the position I occupied I should have frightened away a gallant gentleman? I wanted to oblige everybody. Ah! if M. de Choiseul had but known me, instead of listening to the advice of interested persons, he would have kept his place and been able to give me some good advice; instead of which I was compelled to fall into the hands of people whose interest it was to ruin us, and the King was no better off."

After she left, Comte de Cheverny and the other guests "talked her over," and agreed that they were no longer surprised at the empire she had over an old man of sixty-four, sick of all sorts of pleasures, for she must have been a charming mistress. All were astonished to find her so cheerful and happy, and they were so pleased with her conversation that they begged the old Spaniard to invite them all to meet her on a second occasion.

This account of Madame du Barry was written ten years later, but the lapse of years, and the recollections of the horrors of the Terror, had not driven out of the writer's head the gracious memories of his interview with the beautiful and fascinating Jeanne du Barry. The description he gives of her tallies with that of others who have already been quoted. It is remarkable, too, that the Comte, who had been the "introducer of ambassadors," and as such the arbiter in many a difficult point of etiquette, finds no trace of ill-breeding in the ex-mistress. Eleven years had elapsed since she left Versailles, and though one may understand that when at Court she was always on her guard against committing any indiscretion which her enemies might turn to her disadvantage, that necessity no longer existed, and her innate vulgarity would have

asserted itself with renewed strength had she been the coarse, common strumpet many historians depict. She differed certainly from the great ladies of her time, who affected to be too ethereal and delicate to drink a cup of chocolate but who had plenty of force for the pleasures of the alcove or the gaming table; beings who could simper and whimper over the troubles of the heroine of one of Crebillon's mawkish love stories, but could see a man broken on the wheel without evincing either pity or disgust. From such women Jeanne du Barry differed widely in every respect—physically, mentally, and even morally.

In 1785 occurred the celebrated affair of the Diamond Necklace, the details of which it is unnecessary to recapitulate here, as they are known to everybody. Many writers have implied that Madame du Barry was implicated in this case, and De Lamotte, the woman who personated Marie Antoinette, declared in her *Memoirs* that the forged letters were fabricated at Madame du Barry's house. She was only concerned in the affair in a minor degree. It is, indeed, probable that, when Boehmer set about the fabrication of the necklace, he regarded the favourite as the most likely purchaser, or rather recipient, of this costly gew-gaw, but before the work was finished, Louis XV was dead, and Du Barry in disgrace. The only connection Du Barry had with the affair was that Lamotte, who pretended to be an illegitimate descendant of the house of Valois, had endeavoured to enlist the sympathy and interest of the ex-mistress to procure the restitution of some estates to which she claimed to be entitled. Madame du Barry refused her aid, and destroyed the petition which Lamotte left behind her, but before burning it noticed that it was

signed Marie Antoinette de France de Saint Remy de Valois. The only important point in the deposition of Du Barry was that Lamotte was in the habit of signing herself in the manner given. That her evidence was not regarded as very important is proved by the fact that the name of Jeanne Benedictine Gomard de Vaubernier stood thirty-first on the list of witnesses. If Du Barry had been implicated in the slightest degree, Marie Antoinette, who possessed more than her share of feminine spite, would have been only too glad to get her old enemy under lock and key, but though Madame du Barry went to the Bastille, it was as a witness only, and she was treated with a deference and respect that greatly annoyed Lamotte.

In the *Memoirs* which Lamotte published in London, only a short time before she broke her worthless neck, Du Barry is attacked violently, but as charges which could not well be mentioned here are also brought against Marie Antoinette, we may conclude there was no more truth in one than in the other. One instance of her clumsily constructed lies will suffice. In one of the forged letters supposed to be written by Cardinal de Rohan to the Queen he complains bitterly that Du Barry had shown Louis XV letters which purported to be written by the Cardinal, whilst he was French Ambassador at Vienna, in which Marie Antoinette was painted in the blackest colours. The aim of the concoctors of these forgeries was, of course, to prevent the marriage of the Dauphin. Dame Lamotte might have taken the trouble to make her dates agree. The Dauphin was married to Marie Antoinette in 1770, and Cardinal de Rohan did not go as Ambassador to Vienna till 1772. *Ab uno disce omnes.*

With the exception of the Diamond Necklace affair, there was nothing to disturb the quiet life which Madame du Barry led, and very few records of any incidents connected with her occur in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Revolution. This is easily accounted for by the fact that her *liaison* with the Duc de Brissac still continued, and both parties were anxious to preserve secrecy as to their love affair. He was a constant visitor at Louveciennes, where Madame Lebrun, the celebrated artist, saw him on three occasions on which she stayed there, but she says that he was careful to behave as though he were merely a friend—but a friend who made himself very much at home. After dinner it was the custom of Madame du Barry to adjourn to the celebrated pavilion to take coffee, and as soon as he had finished his cup De Brissac would throw himself down on one of the magnificent sofas, on which Louis XV had often reclined, and would take a siesta, leaving Madame du Barry to take a walk with Madame Lebrun, or any other lady guest who might be stopping at Louveciennes. Du Barry, who, whatever were her faults, was always charitable, visited the poor, and relieved their distress. Madame Lebrun describes the righteous indignation of Du Barry at finding that her servants had omitted to supply with food and clothing a woman who had just been confined. “‘What?’ said Madame du Barry, ‘You have neither linen, wine, nor broth?’ ‘Alas, nothing, Madame.’ As soon as we returned to the château, Madame du Barry called her housekeeper and the other servants who had not executed her orders. I cannot describe her rage: she made them pack up in her presence a parcel of linen

and take it at once to the poor woman with some soup and some Bordeaux wine."

In the evenings when De Brissac was not there, Mesdames du Barry and Lebrun sat by the fire, and the ex-favourite told her companion stories of the old days at Versailles, "always showing the greatest respect for the memory of the late King" and speaking without malice of the courtiers. The only visitors who came to Louve-ciennes whilst Madame Lebrun was there, were Madame de Souza, the wife of the Portuguese Ambassador, the Marquise de Brunoy, and M. de Monville, an eccentric gentleman who lived in a model of a Chinese pagoda in the midst of a beautiful estate which he had christened "the Desert."

Sometimes, when she was quite alone, Madame du Barry would drive into Paris at night and visit the Duc de Brissac at his residence in the Rue de Grenelle—one of these visits was the indirect cause of her losing her head—but on these occasions she travelled *incognito*. When the lovers did not see each other they wrote long letters. A few of those written by De Brissac are still extant. They are a curious mixture of love and politics, and are not always coherent or comprehensible. He was evidently an ardent lover but his expressions of affection are mixed up with details of his daily life in a strange jumble. Sandwiched in between, "Thousands of loves, thousands of thanks, sweetheart. I kiss you thousands of times," and "I love you and for ever," are phrases such as, "I have a rendezvous with Madame de Lascases at eight o'clock this evening: I don't know what she wants of me"; and "I am expecting my visitors who, I think, will be numerous."

Her letters were, no doubt, quite as affectionate, for she was warm-hearted, and had quite forgotten the faithless Seymour. In De Brissac she had at last found "her affinity." Their love was mutual and enduring, and only terminated with their lives.

Madame du Barry saw but little company, and therefore must have been exceedingly surprised when one day in August, 1788, half-a-dozen richly bejewelled Hindus were ushered into her presence, and after much salaaming and a profusion of compliments which the interpreter translated, presented her with several pieces of the finest Indian muslin. They were envoys from Tippu Saib, who at that juncture was contemplating a war with England, and thinking it desirable to have a powerful ally, had sent over to ask the French to assist him. The Ambassadors had heard that Madame du Barry was the mistress of the King, and not being well posted in European affairs, had erroneously supposed that she was the mistress of the reigning King, and the handsome present was no doubt intended to secure her interest in helping them to attain their end. Perhaps Du Barry thought the present was a tribute to her beauty; at any rate she accepted the muslin and afterwards gave one of the pieces to Madame Lebrun, who wore it at a ball many years afterwards.

The poor Ambassadors were doubly unfortunate. They did not succeed in getting money or men from Louis XVI, and when they returned, were promptly beheaded by Tippu Saib for having failed.

Almost at the same time as the visit of these Eastern strangers, Madame du Barry heard of the death of her old friend the Duc de Richelieu, who had been the

means of introducing her to Louis XV—or at all events had had a large share in that transaction—and had supported her in all the Court cabals of Versailles. He must have had an iron constitution, for, although he had indulged in every form of dissipation and vice, he lived half through his ninety-fifth year.

Barely a month later Richelieu's nephew, the Duc d'Aiguillon also died after a long illness. When the Duc de Choiseul was disgraced, the Duc d'Aiguillon became Prime Minister, and though he did not owe his advancement to the Favourite, he was her friend and adviser—at least until the death of Louis XV. Marie Antoinette hated him because he had belonged to the Du Barry party, and also because she believed that he and the Favourite had together brought about the downfall of De Choiseul, who, she believed, had arranged her marriage with the Dauphin. Her feeling toward D'Aiguillon was so well understood by the newspapers of the time that only one or two of the journals mentioned his death, and even they contented themselves by recording in about three lines the decease of a man who had been Prime Minister, and had beaten the English in a fair battle, and, moreover, was at the time of his death Governor of Alsace, a *cordons bleu*, and a descendant of one of the greatest statesmen France had ever had.

Madame de Monrabé, otherwise Madame Rançon, formerly Anne Becu, the mother of Jeanne du Barry, died October 20 this year, in the house at Villiers-sur-Orge which her daughter had given her. She had attained the respectable age of seventy-five. The whole of her property she bequeathed to Madame Boissaison, who was

her niece, and the will does not even contain the name of Jeanne du Barry. As an illegitimate child she could not, it is true, have inherited real estate or money, but it seems to show a want of affection or gratitude on the part of Anne Becu, that Jeanne du Barry, whose conduct, as a daughter at least, was most exemplary, did not receive some souvenir or little gift from the mother she loved so well. This appears to have been the feeling of Rançon, the husband of Anne Becu. He refused to see Madame Boissaison, or to take any money from her, and he wrote long letters to Madame du Barry, complaining of the unjust preference his late wife had shown for her niece. Jeanne might have requested her mother not to make any mention of her in the will, for she was not at all annoyed that she had been overlooked, and did her best to soothe the ruffled feelings of her step-father. She was glad to find that he at least showed some gratitude, and rewarded him by bestowing upon him a pension of two thousand francs a year for life, as a testimony to "his kindness to his wife, his gratitude and attachment to herself, his good qualities, and his honesty."

Before quitting this subject it may be as well to note that one or two of the historians have jumped to the conclusion that Madame de Boissaison, of whom very little is known, was the daughter of Jeanne du Barry. Had that been the case Rançon would certainly have known it, and as his wife could not leave her property, either by will or deed of gift, to her own daughter, he would not have deemed it extraordinary that Anne Becu should leave everything to her granddaughter, nor would he have complained to Madame du Barry that she had been passed over in favour of her own daughter.

CHAPTER IV

MADAME DU BARRY VISITS ENGLAND

THE fall of the Bastille (July 14, 1789) and the disorders which followed it did not, at first, greatly affect Madame du Barry. She continued to live quietly at Louveciennes, and except that she was made the heroine of a satirical poem written by Saint Just, afterwards the colleague of Robespierre, little notice was taken of her during the first few months of the Revolution. Many of the nobility emigrated, and many of those who remained had their châteaux pillaged, but no attempt was made against her—possibly because she was regarded as a daughter of the people, or possibly for fear of the soldiers at Versailles, who had not at that time fraternized with the mob.

Her lover, the Duc de Brissac, though he was to some extent in sympathy with the Revolutionists, was one of the first nobles to be denounced as a traitor to the country. This may have been because he was Governor of Paris, or because he was an aristocrat. Only twelve days after the fall of the Bastille he was arrested at Mans whilst on his way to his country estates, and a courier was sent to Paris to ask whether he should be sent back to the capital under guard, or should be temporarily imprisoned there. The leaders of the Revolutionary party

were not, apparently, in a position to take any steps against him at that time, and he was either set free or managed to escape from his captors. He was not so fortunate on the next occasion.

In October, 1789, thousands of Parisians marched to Versailles, to demand bread. They invaded the Palace in spite of the gallant defence of the *Garde du Corps*, many of whom were wounded, and a few killed, whilst protecting the King and Queen. According to Laffont d'Ausonne¹ some of the wounded soldiers made their way to Louveciennes, where they were received by the Comtesse du Barry, who sheltered them in her château, and showed them every care and attention. This was told the Queen, who was then at Paris, where all the Royal Family had been brought by the people, and she charged some gentleman in her suite to go to Louveciennes, and thank Madame du Barry for the kindness shown to the wounded Guards. Madame du Barry replied :

“MADAME,

“The young men who were wounded, only regret that they did not die along with their comrades for a Princess so perfect, and so worthy of all respect as Your Majesty assuredly is. What I have done for these brave soldiers is much less than they deserve. Had I had no waiting women and other servants, I would have attended to them myself. I console them, and honour them for the wounds they have received, for I remember, Madame, that had it not been for those wounds and their devotion to duty Your Majesty might not now be alive.

¹ *Notices historiques* appended to *Mémoires de la Reine de France*, p. 398.

"Luciennes is at your disposal, Madame. Do I not owe it to your favour and kindness? All that I possess is derived from the Royal Family, and I have too much good feeling and gratitude to ever forget that. The late King, by a sort of presentiment, obliged me to accept many valuable presents before he sent me away. I had the honour to offer you these treasures at the time of the "meeting of the Notabilities"; I now offer them again, Madame, heartily and sincerely;—you have so many expenses to bear, and so many benefits to bestow. Allow me, I beg, to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's.

"Your Majesty's most faithful servant and subject,
"COMTESSE DU BARRY."

The letter is written in excellent French and is free from errors in orthography. This, coupled with the fact that Laffont d'Ausonne is not the most trustworthy authority in the world, has caused the authenticity of the letter to be doubted, but M. Vatel ascertained from local tradition that Madame du Barry did shelter two of the *Gardes du Corps* after the "October massacres," and he also found out that their names were Marion de Barghon-Monteil, and Lefebvre de Lubersac. Marie Antoinette admired and respected the brave men who had fought for her, and it was but natural that she should thank Madame du Barry for having cared for two of the wounded men, nor is it at all inconsistent with the character of Jeanne du Barry that she should have offered Louveciennes to the Queen. It was not the first or last time she offered to make restitution of her ill-gotten wealth. As regards the form of the letter, it must be remembered that Laffont

d'Aunonne had not the original document, but transcribed the contents of the letter from hearsay, and clothed the ideas in his own language.

Her confessed sympathy for the King and Queen does not seem to have been the cause of any annoyance to Madame du Barry, nor were any attacks made against her in the Press, with the exception of an ominous croak from Marat, who mentions in 1790, that the National Assembly cost only a quarter of the money that old sinner Louis XV used to lavish on a favourite strumpet, and adds that he saw Du Barry twenty years before, covered with diamonds, and giving away by basketsful the *louis d'or* of the nation to her thieves of relations.

Few people read the *Ami du Peuple*, and not much attention was paid to the denunciations of the half-mad horseleech, but two months later an incident occurred which was the means of drawing public attention to Madame du Barry, and ultimately bringing her to the scaffold.

On January 10, 1791, a grand fête was given by the Duc de Brissac, at his residence in the Rue de Grenelle. Madame du Barry was one of the guests, and slept at the Duc's hôtel, where a suite of rooms was always reserved for her. Early the following morning, a messenger arrived in haste from Louveciennes, to say that burglars had broken into the château, and had carried off all the jewellery of the ex-favourite. Madame du Barry at once returned to Louveciennes, and gave information to the sergeant of the gendarmes, and also sent at once for her jeweller Rouen, who was possibly related to her notary, for both had the same name. The jeweller was by no means a clever man away from his bench, and—after com-

forting Du Barry with the assurance that he should be able to identify every stone, as they had been through his hands so often—he hastened back to Paris, and at once had the walls placarded with bills giving a portentously long list of the mounted and unmounted precious stones. Information concerning the missing stones was to be given to Madame du Barry, Lucienne near Marly, or to M. Rouen, notary, Rue des Petits Champs, or to M. Rouen, jeweller and goldsmith, Rue Saint Louis au Palais, etc. To complete the bill and add the finishing stroke of genius to it, he added,

TWO THOUSAND LOUIS REWARD

or a proportionate sum for any portion of the missing jewels.

The effect of this ill-judged production may be easily guessed. The placards were perused by hundreds of patriots who had black thoughts in their breasts and not over much food in their stomachs, and they formed exaggerated ideas as to what was likely to be the value of jewels for which a reward of 40,000 francs was offered. The women also were likely to be bitter against one who had made so much money by her personal charms. The papers of that time were apt to inflame the passions of the populace rather than calm them, and they soon found out how popular opinion was running. Prudhomme's *Revolution de Paris* led the way by asserting that a young Swiss soldier, whose duty it was to guard the outside of the château de Louveciennes, had been lured from his post, and made drunk by the robbers, in order to give them an opportunity to enter the house, and that Madame du Barry, on discovering this, had driven in a coach and four to Courbevoise, and obtained from the commandant

of the Swiss Guards, a body of *fifty* men to arrest the culprit. The young Swiss, who was much esteemed and liked by his comrades, was soon taken—which is not to be wondered at, considering the force employed—and was put in irons in the darkest cell.

Prudhomme declared that the theft of all the diamonds of Golconda would not justify such a violation of the rights of man, and that the soldier ought not to be punished, merely for being suspected of having neglected his duty, by a woman who was proud of having been the first courtesan in the Kingdom.

It is not at all probable that Du Barry ever complained to the commanding officer, but the much esteemed young Swiss must have gone at fewest five hundred yards—there was no *cabaret* nearer—with the persons who invited him to drink, and such a dereliction from duty was certainly not punished too heavily by a few days in the guard-house, especially in a regiment which prided itself upon its discipline.

One of the ablest detectives of the day was also employed to find the thieves, but a month passed without any news, when, on February 15, Madame du Barry received a letter from England saying that the thieves had been caught. The gang consisted of five men; three German Jews, a Frenchman, and an Englishman named Harris, who acted as interpreter. They arrived in London, and called upon a rich jeweller, to whom they offered some diamonds at about one sixth of their value. He paid them £1,500, and asked if they had any more to sell, to which they replied in the affirmative, whereupon he laid information against them, and caused them all to be arrested.

On receipt of this news Madame du Barry at once started for London, accompanied by a friend, the Chevalier d'Escourre, a lady's maid, two footmen, and the valet of the Chevalier. They also took with them Rouen, the jeweller, who having reset the diamonds several times could easily identify the stones.

Horace Walpole, in his usual jesting manner, mentions the visit, and says that the Lord Mayor provided a grand banquet when she appeared before him to give evidence. She could not recognise any of the robbers, but Rouen declared that the stones were "the laborious work of his hands."

Possibly there was some delay in the trial, for Madame du Barry returned to France very soon, but promised to revisit England in April. The expenses of this first journey to England—amounting to six thousand one hundred and ninety-three francs—were paid by the Duc de Brissac, who looked upon himself as being the involuntary cause of the robbery.

She left home again on April 4, and arrived in London on April 9, and remained till May 18. In the list of her expenses occurs the item, "paid at the prison to see Levet, one shilling." Levet, one of the authors of the robbery, was a nephew of a member of the National Assembly, and, as one of the Paris papers sarcastically observed, "had the impertinence to wish to be hanged before his uncle."

Her expenses during this stay, of fewer than six weeks, reached the large total of £15,059 8s. 9d. but she bought two English horses. The jeweller, Rouen, who accompanied her on this occasion also, only appears to have expended five hundred and eighty francs for his

personal account, but some years later, after the execution of Madame du Barry he put in a claim for nearly ten thousand francs for expenses and loss of time.

Madame du Barry arrived at Louveciennes on Saturday, May 21, but on the following Monday a messenger came to her to say that her presence was necessary in England, and she left for London the same night. She took apartments in Bruton Street, Berkeley Square, where she remained till nearly the end of August. The burglars were acquitted, the robbery not having been committed within English jurisdiction. Madame du Barry had to obtain from the French Courts a condemnation of the culprits, and a declaration that the jewels were really her property. The diamonds were lodged in the hands of Messrs. Ransom, Morland, and Hammersley pending the proof of a claim to their possession.¹

This necessitated a stay of a long time, which Madame du Barry employed in pleasure. She went into society, was to be seen at Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and other resorts; bought books, (including a Shakespeare in parts and Paine's *Rights of Man*) for herself or her friends; had her portrait painted by Cosway, and in fact behaved very much as a "modish lady" would be expected to. Liberal as usual, she gave away large sums to the poor, as may be seen by the entries in her journal. At last the formalities were concluded, the requirements of the law satisfied, and Madame du Barry returned to Louveciennes, where she arrived on August 25.

¹ See Note D, at end of volume.

CHAPTER V

THE DEATH OF DE BRISSAC

(1792—1793)

THE life of Madame du Barry, during the winter of 1791—92 was uneventful, but that of the Duc de Brissac was far otherwise. He came of a stock which had, for generations past, produced brave and loyal soldiers, and he was one of the few persons in whom the unfortunate King could repose confidence. When the flight of the Royal Family was first contemplated, De Brissac was suggested as being the most likely man to carry out the scheme successfully, but his attachment to Madame du Barry was well known, and it was feared that he would confide the secret to her, and that she might reveal it, so the direction of the expedition was confided to M. Gabriel de Choiseul. After his capture at Varennes, Louis XVI continued to reign, in name at least, and one of the first acts of the Legislative Assembly was to permit the King to have a "constitutional guard," composed of twelve hundred infantry, and six hundred cavalry—men of from twenty to thirty years of age selected from the regiments of the line, or the National Guard. Louis, who was allowed to nominate one third of the men, and the officers, offered the

command of the household brigade to the Duc de Brissac, though the appointment was much against the wishes of Marie Antoinette, whose resentment against Du Barry still existed, and extended to anyone who dared to admire the mistress of the late King.

De Brissac was far too loyal and devoted to the King to act the part of gaoler, which was what the Assembly really required of him, and within a few days of his taking possession of his command (October 16, 1791) complaints, which soon became denunciations, were levelled against him. It is, perhaps, wonderful, under the circumstances, that he was able to retain his position for nearly eight months. On May 30, 1792, the Assembly disbanded the household troops, declared De Brissac a traitor, and ordered that he should be arrested and taken before the High Court then sitting at Orléans.

Though informed that his arrest was imminent, De Brissac made no attempt to escape. He sat up the greater part of the night, writing a long letter to his mistress, and at six o'clock in the morning he was arrested. The exasperation of the people was so great that special precautions had to be taken to ensure his safe arrival at Orléans. A letter from his *aide-de-camp* to Madame du Barry, written on June 2, announces that the Duc had arrived at Orléans without any incidents having occurred on the road. The writer (M. de Maussabré) adds that he has so many important commissions to perform that he is afraid he shall be unable to wait upon the Comtesse.

It would appear that he did eventually go to Louveciennes, for Madame du Barry alludes to his visit, in a letter addressed to De Brissac a few days later, in which she tries to comfort him with the assurance that he would

soon be released, as reason and good sense would show that he was innocent. There is evidence to prove that Du Barry went to visit De Brissac, and it is averred that she took with her a large sum of money in order to compass his escape, but apparently she was unable to seduce any of the patriots from their duty, for no trace of any attempt at escape can be discovered.

De Brissac appeared before his judges on June 14, and after being examined was reconducted to his prison, an old convent in the Rue Illiers. Whilst awaiting the verdict he amused himself by studying geography. He had the refectory of the convent repainted at his expense, and converted into an exercise room, in which the prisoners could play battledore and shuttlecock. But in the meanwhile the excitement at Paris was increasing: the country was declared to be in danger, and then came the massacre of the Swiss Guards, and the imprisonment of the Royal Family. De Brissac foresaw at once what his fate was likely to be, but he was a soldier and did not fear death. He made his will, and in a codicil added:

"I give and bequeath to Madame du Barry of Louveciennes, above and beyond what I owe her, an annuity for life of twenty-four thousand francs, or the sum of three hundred thousand francs paid down, whichever she may prefer. I beg her to accept this slight token of my feelings and gratitude, as I consider myself her debtor, as I was the involuntary cause of the loss of her jewels."

In Paris the people were clamouring for the head of De Brissac. The author of one pamphlet offered twelve thousand francs (but did not say by whom the money was to be paid) to anyone who would make a "little Saint Denis of M. Timoléon Cossé-Brissac," and Marat, the friend of the

people, published a letter purporting to come from one of the gardeners in the employ of the Duc, who declared he had overheard a conspiracy between De Brissac, the Spanish Ambassador, and Madame du Barry, to effect the escape of the King, by means of a subterranean passage which ran between the gardens of the Duc and the Duc du Châtelet. Almost at the same time came the news that some of the prisoners confined in the old convent at Orléans had made their escape, and four of those who had been tried by the High Court had been acquitted. Orders were immediately given that the remaining prisoners should be brought to the castle of Saumur.

The prisoners were placed on gun carriages, and were escorted by a detachment of National Guards under the command of Fournier, "the American," and Lazowsky, a Pole. At every town through which they passed they were hooted and threatened, and as they neared Versailles the popular excitement increased. The Mayor of Versailles, fearing that the prisoners would be attacked, gave orders that the *cortège* should not pass through the town, and that the prisoners should be confined for the night in the cages of the menagerie. On the road thither the escort was met by an armed crowd, who demanded that De Brissac and Lessart should be given up to them. The others, they said, would be punished sooner or later, but those two, if suffered to go, would make their escape. The Mayor tried to calm the people, but in vain. A rush was made at the gun carriages, and the escort, which made but a pretence at defence, was quickly swept aside. De Brissac and his companions were brutally murdered; his head was cut off and carried through the streets of Versailles on a pike, and the people, in the madness of their

ferocity, danced round his corpse, insulted it, mangled it, and even ate portions of it. His head, carried on a pike, was taken, it is said, to Louveciennes and shown to Madame du Barry, who fainted at the horrible sight. According to one account the head was thrown into the *salon*, but the story appears to be apocryphal. If the wretches who had murdered De Brissac in cold blood had gone as far as Louveciennes they would not have contented themselves with showing the unhappy Du Barry the head of her lover, and her death would have quickly followed his. There is a legend that a skull, which might have been that of De Brissac, was found in the gardens of Louveciennes only a few years ago.

It was Sunday, September 9, when De Brissac perished. Early in the following month Madame du Barry prepared for a fourth and last visit to England, on business connected with the loss of her jewels. When the diamonds were stolen De Brissac and Rouen, the jeweller, together—seemingly without consulting Madame du Barry—drew up a bill by which they offered two thousand louis, *and* a fair and proportionate reward on the recovery of any portion of the missing jewels. The reward was claimed by a Jew, named Simon, a jeweller in London to whom some of the jewels were offered for purchase and who denounced the thieves to the police. To Madame du Barry this reward appeared excessive, but nevertheless she would have paid it, for, as is proved by her confession, she had borrowed the money from the Duc de Brissac. There is no doubt that De Brissac would have paid the reward, for he considered himself as the involuntary cause of the robbery, and the loan was, in fact, a delicately disguised

gift. But Du Barry was forced to oppose the absurd demand made, for Simon claimed the two thousand louis, and "a fair and proportionate reward."

She was, moreover, compelled to wait in London till the case was decided, for not until then could she obtain possession of the jewels which still lay in Ransom's Bank. She remained in London till March 1, 1793, but she did not, as on the former occasion, pass the time in pleasures, or in visiting the English nobility. Her attachment for De Brissac was too deep, and his death too recent to allow her to indulge in amusements, but she frequented the houses of some of the *émigrés*, and was noticed there by some of the spies—men who to save their own unworthy necks were ready to denounce anybody.

On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI was beheaded. When the news was received in England it created a deep impression. Funeral services were held in all the Catholic chapels—that at the Spanish Embassy Chapel was attended by Madame du Barry, a fact that was not forgotten when she appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal.

At last, on February 27, the case terminated, and the Court awarded the jeweller Simon a thousand louis. The diamonds were to be given up to her on payment of the costs, but she never saw these unfortunate stones again. She had been absent from France fully four months, and she resolved to return home—possibly to procure the money to pay Simon, and the costs of the action. Her friends urged her to remain in London, where she would have been safe, and warned her that her head would be in danger should she return, but she replied that she was bound in honour to go back. The account given by Madame Guémard in her *Mémoires* of an interview between

Madame du Barry and Pitt, in which the latter gave her a medal bearing his portrait, and told her that if she returned she would meet the fate of Regulus, is apocryphal, like much else written by that singular woman.

It was March 1 when Du Barry left London, and she arrived at Calais two days later, but there was then war between France and England and she was compelled to remain at Calais until she obtained a passport, which was not until the 17th of the month. She arrived at Louveciennes a few days later, and exactly six months afterwards the doors of Sainte Pelagie closed upon her.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST SCENE OF ALL

(1793)

A GREAT change had come over Louveciennes during the few short months that Du Barry had been absent. When she left, the inhabitants of the village were poor simple peasants, undisturbed by the political storms which were raging at Paris and Versailles, and grateful to Madame du Barry for the many substantial benefits she had conferred upon them, their wives, and their children. When she returned, the hamlet was a nest of sans-culottism and the villagers were "patriots," as rabidly violent as those of the Faubourg St. Antoine.

Soon after her departure, an Englishman, named George Greive, came to Louveciennes, and took lodgings at the inn. He described himself as "a literary man, born at Newcastle, England, and now a citizen of the United States of America," and took the singular title of "Factionist and anarchist of the first rank, and disorganizer of despotism in both hemispheres." He spoke French fluently, and wrote it correctly—he had translated Priestley, Washington, and Franklin, into French—and in a very short time he had inoculated the men of Louveciennes

with the doctrines of faction and anarchy he professed.

What reason he had for hating Madame du Barry is unknown. One writer has hit upon the idea that he had paid his addresses to her, had been scornfully rejected, and acted out of revenge for the slight put upon him. It is scarcely likely that if he had wished to possess her he would have denounced her to the Convention. What is more probable is that he was a mere ordinary demagogue of the bloodthirsty type, thirsting for notoriety and anxious to curry favour with the leaders of the Revolution by denouncing somebody. He was a friend of Marat, and was to have dined with him on July 14, but on the previous day the knife of Charlotte Corday rid the world of that monster. It is not unlikely that Marat had suggested Du Barry as a victim whose downfall it would be easy to bring about, and whose wealth would be very useful to the People, who would no doubt liberally reward the "patriot" who should denounce her.

It was not often that a patriot came across a "good thing" that was at once so pleasant, so profitable and so easy, and Greive lost no time in going to Louveciennes. Madame du Barry was then in England, and Greive easily persuaded the villagers that she was an *émigrée* and had no intention of coming back. Seals were put on the doors of the château, as a preparatory step to confiscation, but the sudden return of Madame du Barry interfered with this arrangement, and she had little trouble in inducing the Mayor of Louveciennes to remove the seals.

Greive, though defeated in his first attempt, was not discouraged. It cost him some time and trouble to counteract the personal influence of Du Barry, now she was

on the spot and displaying her usual liberality to the villagers, and it was not until June 26 that he was able to launch his second bolt, which took the form of an "address" to the authorities of the Department of the Seine et Oise. His address, to which he had procured the signatures of thirty-six of the inhabitants of Louveciennes, complained of the presence in their midst of many aristocrats and suspected persons. Madame du Barry was not named, but was hinted at so plainly that she, her relations, and her head servants, were notified that they were to consider themselves as under arrest.

This did not satisfy Greive, who wanted her removed to prison, and he therefore went to Paris, accompanied by some of "the brave sans-culottes of Louveciennes" to denounce Du Barry to the Convention. The reply of the President of the Convention to the deputation was, "Be assured that the head of this she-conspirator shall fall, if the charges are proved." He gave orders that Madame du Barry was to remain under arrest in her own house, guarded by a *gendarme* kept there at her expense; and sent the petition to the Committee of Public Safety, which body ordered the *directoire* of the department of Seine et Oise to hold an inquiry at Louveciennes, to ascertain whether Citoyenne du Barry was guilty of "uncivicism."

The enquiry was held within the next few days, for no time was lost in legal delays in those times—and the witnesses called for the prosecution were the thirty-six inhabitants who had signed the petition. Several of them backed out of giving evidence, and declared they had not understood what they were signing, and those who did appear could adduce nothing beyond rambling statements and reiterations of vague rumours. On the other hand there were

fifty-nine respectable persons, including the Mayor, and several "notables" who were ready to testify that Citoyenne du Barry was "the benefactress of the village, that they had seen her in all sorts of weathers taking food and money to the sick and the poor, that she readily paid all ordinary or extraordinary taxes that were levied, and had proved her patriotism by lending one of her rooms for the meetings of the local committee." The counter-petition on her behalf, which contains these phrases, concludes with the statement that the village "had never known the disturbances which trouble the peace of respectable citizens until six months ago, when some persons who came and established themselves in our midst, began to disturb the harmony and good feeling which had always existed"—an obvious hit at Greive and some of his supporters, the principal one of whom was a spy and informer named Blache.

The result could not be doubtful if the tribunal was to preserve any show or semblance of justice, and a decree was published (August 13, 1793) that Citoyenne du Barry was to be restored to liberty. Her first act was to demand the liberation of her servants, which was immediately granted. The *directoire* of the Seine et Oise was inclined to deal leniently with Du Barry—in fact one of its members, Lavallery, was supposed to have a partiality for the favourite, who was still, in spite of her fifty years, an exceedingly handsome woman. The supposition, however, rests on no better basis than that in some of his letters to her on business connected with her arrest, he uses such expressions as a "gallant" Frenchman would be likely to, when writing to a pretty woman. Of his fate, and its connection with that of Du Barry, something will be said in due course.

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Greive had met with a severe rebuff, but it only stimulated him to further efforts. His rage at being baffled of his prey found vent in a pamphlet with the title of "Sham Equality, or a Short Account of the Protection, containing the documents relating to the arrest of the Du Barry, former mistress of Louis XV, to serve as examples to those over-ardent patriots who would save the Republic, and those moderates who marvellously well understand how to ruin it." The author signed himself "Greive, official defender of the brave Sans-culottes of Louveciennes, friend of Franklin and Marat, factionist, etc., etc." The "protection" mentioned in the sub-title was that which the Departmental authorities were supposed to have extended to Du Barry, and the whole pamphlet is a violent diatribe against the "courtesan of Louveciennes, the bacchante crowned with ivy and roses," whose death is demanded a score of times.

The wisest course for Madame du Barry would have been to procure a passport directly her trial was over, and return to England, but there were various causes which prevented this. Firstly, she no doubt believed that her troubles were over, or trusted to the respectable inhabitants of the village to save her if she was again attacked. Secondly, if she had fled she would have been unable to take with her anything but such few jewels as she had left, and a little money, and would have had to leave her château and all its art treasures to her enemies. Thirdly, we are compelled to own that there seems to have been another lover in the case. Amongst her papers was found a letter which though not signed, was in the handwriting of Rohan-Chabot,—a letter which breathes a passion which seems to have been reciprocated. Little or

nothing can be said in extenuation of her conduct; conduct which proves that she was a confirmed courtesan by inclination and habit, but she paid dearly for her sins, and succeeding generations have debited her with many other vices she did not possess, and omitted to credit her with such good qualities as she had.

Early in September some of the members of the Committee of Public Safety retired, and their places were taken by new men, who, Greive thought, would be likely to listen to his denunciations of Du Barry. He again brought the subject forward, and this time was successful in gaining his end. An order was issued on September 21 that the woman Du Barry should be taken to the prison of Sainte Pelagie. Citizen Greive was entrusted with the execution of the order, and the sum of three thousand francs was paid to him to defray the expenses. As may be surmised, he lost no time in carrying out the orders he had so long awaited in vain, and the next day Jeanne du Barry was arrested, and lodged in the prison of Sainte Pelagie, and seals were placed upon the doors of the château.

Madame Roland was in Sainte Pelagie at the same time as Du Barry, but the two women had nothing in common, except their remarkable beauty, and no mention of the mistress of Louis XV is to be found in the Memoirs of Madame Roland. Mademoiselle de Raucourt, the actress to whom, when quite a young girl, Du Barry had presented a magnificent dress, was also an inmate of the prison, but whether they recognized or knew each other we cannot say.

On October 2 Madame du Barry wrote a letter to the Administrators of the Department of the Seine et Oise, to complain that their verdict of acquittal had been

overridden by the action of the Committee of Public Safety, and to beg that they would not allow Citizen Greive to pillage her house. She concluded with the assurance that she was deeply attached to her country, and had she wished to leave it, she could on the four journeys which she had taken to England, have removed all her wealth. The letter did not do any good, for on the day after it was written, the body of Lavallery, her best friend on the Seine et Oise Committee was found in the Seine. A romance has been constructed by some writers out of his death, for it was alleged that he was so madly in love with Du Barry that he drowned himself on hearing of her death. As a matter of fact his patriotism was suspected, and a warrant for his arrest had been issued, and being fully aware that Greive and others of the same class would secure his conviction, he drowned himself to escape the ignominy of a public execution. At the time that he committed suicide Madame du Barry had certainly not been executed, and possibly not even arrested, for his body had been in the water many days when it was found on October 3.

Not having obtained any help from this quarter, Du Barry wrote, or rather caused to be written, a long letter to the Committee of Public Safety. In this she asks that her servants, who were arrested with her, should be set at liberty, as it was not right they should suffer in a cause of which they knew nothing. Being unaware that Greive was the agent of the Committee she assails him in this letter and complains that he behaved with a brutality which "her pen refuses to write."

In the meantime Greive was busy at Louveciennes. He had some literary ability, and he carefully went

through all the letters and papers he could find in the château, sorting them, and affixing to many annotations in his own hand. He was assisted in this work by Salanave, who had formerly been a servant in the employ of Du Barry, and Zamor, the negro. The last named was the little black boy whom Du Barry had brought up, and on whom Louis XV was reported to have conferred the title of Governor of Louveciennes. Having been petted and spoiled when a child, he became so insolent and over-bearing when he grew up, that Madame du Barry was obliged to send him away. He appeared as a witness against her at her trial, and declared that the reason of his dismissal was that his patriotism and "civicism" had offended the aristocratic prejudices of Madame du Barry.

This respectable trio also collected all the valuables they could find, and made an exact inventory of all the money and jewels they discovered, for the knowledge that each one was a spy on the other two kept them honest. Greive also drew up a list of the necessary witnesses for the Du Barry trial. It comprised twenty-seven persons, with Greive himself at the head of the list, but Fouquier-Tinville struck out more than half the names. This rather offended Greive, who, fearing lest his prey should escape, or to prove his zeal to the cause of the Republic, handed to the Committee of Public Safety twenty-six of the letters he had found. The Committee thereupon ordered two of its members, Voulland and Jagot, to go to Sainte Pelagie and interrogate Du Barry concerning these letters.

The particulars of this interrogatory were discovered by M. Vatel in the *dossier* of the unfortunate Princess Lubomirska, where they had evidently been placed by error. A few extracts from it will show on what a very slender

basis the charges against Du Barry reposed, and the truthful, honest, and straightforward manner in which she answered the questions which were put to her. The only point in which she deviated from the truth was in regard to her age, for though she described herself as forty-two she was fifty—but women of more than thirty seldom tell the truth about their age.

Examination of Madame du Barry, the 9th of the 2nd month (October 30, 1793) of the year II of the French Republic.

Q. What is your name?

A. Jeanne Vaubernier du Barry, aged forty-two, usually residing at Louveciennes in a house which belongs as much to me as to the nation.

Q. Have you made several journeys to London?

A. I have made four.

Q. What were the motives of these various journeys, and at what times were they made?

A. They were in connection with a robbery of diamonds and other property which took place the night of 10th to 11th January, 1791. The date of my first journey was the 17th of February following; the second, the 4th of April, the same year; the third, in the course of the following June; and the fourth in October, 1792.

Q. With whom did you travel from Paris to London in your several journeys?

A. The first time with M. Escourre, a maid, two lackeys, a valet, and Rouen, a jeweller living in Paris; the second time with the same persons; the third also with the same, with the exception of the jeweller who came during my

stay; and the fourth with a valet, a maid, and a lackey.

Q. To whom did you entrust your affairs during your absence?

A. My affairs, which were merely domestic, were confided to a valet-de-chambre named Morin.

Q. From whom did you receive, at London, the money for your personal and legal expenses?

A. From Citizen Vandenyver, banker at Paris, Rue Vivienne, who gave me a letter of credit on Thelusson, banker at London. It was during my last stay that I made use of this letter of credit.

Q. Is your lawsuit concluded?

A. It finished on the 27th of February, which was the last day of term.

Q. In the last journeys you made to London were you provided with passports?

A. Yes.

Q. From whom did you procure the last?

A. From the Municipality of Louveciennes. It was *visé* by the Department of Seine et Oise. I obtained the former ones from the Municipality of Paris, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Montmorin.

Q. Did you, before your last journey, demand a passport from the Minister for Foreign Affairs?

A. Yes, but he refused it. Then I addressed myself to my municipality, as M. Lebrun had advised me, and I obtained a passport which was *visé* by the *directoire* of Versailles, and the Department of Seine et Oise, and I left with that passport only.

Q. Was not a date specified for your return in that passport?

A. No date was specified, and could not reasonably be so, as a law-case had to be concluded.

Q. During the time you were in London, decrees were issued by the National Convention ordering all French persons who had quitted the Republic within a certain time to return, under penalty of being considered as *émigrés*, and treated as such. Did you know of this?

A. I knew of these decrees, but I did not consider they concerned me as I had left for a definite reason, and was provided with a passport.

Q. Persons who interested themselves in your behalf, wrote to urge you to return to France to avoid the risks you would run by not obeying the decrees against those persons who were out of the territory of the Republic. Why did you neglect these warnings?

A. I do not remember having received such advice. If I had, I should have followed it.

A letter from Vandenyver, the banker, containing the words mentioned, was then shown to her, but she pointed out that the next sentence was, "However, I do not think you can be regarded as such (an *émigré*) seeing that you are provided with passports, and it is well-known that your journey had no other motive than the settlement of your lawsuit."

Q. During your stay in London, war was declared between France and England. Under these circumstances why did you not quit the enemy's shores?

A. War was declared such a short time before my departure,¹ and my case was on the point of being decided. I therefore prolonged my stay in order to avoid a fresh journey.

Several questions followed concerning a sum of two

¹February 1, 1793.

hundred thousand francs which Du Barry had lent to Roban-Chabot, the Commissioners endeavouring to prove that she had also lent a similar sum to the Bishop of Rouen, and she denying all knowledge of the transaction. They then commenced taking *seriatim* the letters with which Greive had provided them, beginning with two letters from General Custine and his son, which Du Barry declared did not belong to her, she having picked them up by accident, with some other papers, after writing a letter at the house of the Duc de Brissac. The questions put had evidently the double purpose of making Du Barry confess that she knew certain aristocrats, and finding out the addresses and other particulars concerning her correspondents, with a view to collecting evidence which would incriminate them.

Q. From whom is this letter which was written to you from La Meillerage, 9th April, 1793?

A. That letter is from the Marquise de Mortemart, who wrote from La Meillerage, an estate belonging to her mother, Madame de Nagu.

Q. Who is the friend who was charged by the writer of the letter to give you her thanks?

A. I saw no friend of hers.

Q. From whom is this letter which was written to you on the 5th of June?

A. It is from Madame de Mortemart, who wrote to me from Aix la Chapelle under date of 5th June, 1792.

Q. Who is the gentleman whose name is left blank?

A. The husband of Madame de Mortemart.

Q. What was the name on the back of the letter that has been effaced? Did you efface it, and why?

A. I do not know what the name was, and I did not efface it.

Q. Who is the "safe person" at Paris through whose hands this letter came, and how did it reach you?

A. I do not know through whose hands the letter passed.

Q. Who is the person who wrote you this letter dated "Sunday morning"?

A. A Polish Princess named Lubomirska, who wrote to me in August (I believe) this year.

Q. Has she been long in France, and do you know where she is to be found now?

A. I do not know when she came, or where she now lives.

Q. Has she ever been to your house, and when?

A. I have seen her many times—the first time in 1789, and the last in June this year. I believe she lives near Chaillot—she formerly lived in the Palais Salm.

Q. Can you give any explanation of the meaning of this letter?

A. I can give none, as I did not write it. If I had written it I should have been able to explain the meaning.

Q. Did you write this letter dated "Wednesday, eleven o'clock"?

A. Yes.

Q. To whom was it addressed, and when was it written?

A. It was addressed to M. de Brissac the day that he left for Orleans, or the previous evening, but was not sent as I heard news of him from one of his people.

Q. Who is the Abbé mentioned in this letter?

A. The Abbé Billardi, employed in the Foreign Office.

He died last year or the beginning of this year, during my stay in London.

Q. Who wrote this letter dated Val, Sunday, 28th August?

A. It is from the Maréchal de Beauvau. I believe it to be an old letter—that is to say of 1791.

Q. Who is the Englishman mentioned in the letter, and how could he convey letters?

A. A man named Forth who discovered the theft of my diamonds and who brought me back to France, 25th August, 1792.

Q. Who wrote this note dated 3rd April?

A. M. Dangeviller, *directeur des batiments* to the King, who wrote to me in 1791.

Q. For whom was this letter, of which you were asked to take charge, intended? It says, "There is no address, but Madame la Comtesse will know to whom to forward it."

A. The letter was for Madame Calonne, but was not sent because I forgot it.

Q. In the several journeys you made to London did you have any intercourse with the French *émigrés* in that city?

A. I saw some French people who were in London, and whom I had known. It was difficult for me to close my doors to them.

Q. Name those you saw most frequently?

A. M. Crussol, M. de Poix, M. de Cahonet, M. de Calonne. The last named I only saw on the day of my arrival, as he left the next day. I also saw the wives of these gentlemen, and I met M. d'Aiguillon once only. I usually frequented the houses of the English ladies.

Q. Did you give any money to the *émigrés* who had taken refuge in London?

A. I never gave them any money, but there was due to me from an English lady one hundred and thirty-four guineas, owing since my second visit to London, and during my last stay I requested Madame de Crussol to obtain the money if she could. She gave me a receipt for fifty louis, as the whole sum was intended for two persons.

Q. Who was the other person?

A. The Bishop of Lombes who was at London, in exile, I believe. I may add that I always expected to be repaid.

Q. What is the name of this Bishop?

A. His name is Blot de Chavigni.

Q. How was the receipt worded which Madame de Crussol gave you for the fifty louis?

A. I do not remember: I have lost it; I do not know where I have put it.

Q. Explain to us this account kept by you, and which shows that you distributed many guineas to various persons in London, amongst whom were persons named Pauline, Henriette, Fortuné, M. Melino, and Frondeville.

A. Pauline is Madame de Mortemart; Henriette is my maid; Fortuné is an Englishman; Melino is English, Frondeville is the President of the Parliament of Rouen. The money handed to Madame de Mortemart was for various things of which I had need, as were also the sums handed to my maid, Henriette. Melino, who conducted my lawsuit, had made some advances which I was bound to repay. Fortuné and Frondeville gambled on my account, and I gave to the one twenty-two guineas, and to the other twenty-five, which they repaid.

Q. Who is the "dame Brancas" who is mentioned in the invitation to dine with the Duke of Queensberry?

A. She accompanied me on my last journey to London.

She was going to Holland to obtain the property of her father who had died there. She had obtained a passport, not from the Minister Lebrun, but from his predecessor.

Q. Have you seen Frondeville in France?

A. I saw him but once. He was brought to my house by M. Lavopulière. That was in the time of the Constituent Assembly of which Frondeville was a member.

Q. Why, in the case concerning the loss of your diamonds, did you refuse the evidence of Rouen, whom you had brought to London on purpose?

A. I did not refuse the evidence of Rouen, as he came three times to London to give evidence, but on the last occasion I thought I could do without him if possible, my reason for that being the very heavy sum he demanded. Knowing, however, that I could not do without him, he afterwards came to London.

Q. Was the list of the diamonds you had printed, correct, and did it contain the description of all those stolen from you? Did it not contain descriptions of others besides those stolen?

A. The description was perfectly true with the exception of a chain of emeralds and diamonds which was stolen and which was brought to M. de Brissac during my third stay in London. M. de Brissac gave a hundred louis to the person who brought it to him.

Q. Did you not take steps to sell your diamonds? Did you send them abroad for that purpose, and, if so, when?

A. In 1789 or 1790, I applied to Vandenyver, who sent a part of my diamonds to Holland, but the price offered not being sufficient, I withdrew the jewels from the hands of Vandenyver, and gave him a receipt cancelling the receipt he had given me.

Q. Do you know Citizen Rotondo?

A. All I know of him is that he frightened me terribly once when he came to my house to demand some money, under the pretext that he would stop the production of a comedy, the principal character of which, he said, was intended for me. That was in the year 1792.

Q. Some days before your arrest did you not have conveyed to a goldsmith of Paris a large chest full of gold plate which he had bought?

A. I have not sent any to Paris, but I sent some plate to Versailles, by one of my servants, to have the crest removed, in conformity with the decree.

Q. What is the name of the goldsmith at Versailles, and who is the person who took the plate to him?

A. I believe that the goldsmith is named Massé, and the person entrusted with the plate was Fisson, a member of my household.

Q. Have you any cash or specie in your house?

A. I have packed, or hidden, in my house, eleven sacks of twelve hundred livres each, in crowns of six livres, and fifteen hundred and thirty-one louis of twenty-four livres which do not belong to me, and which I had borrowed from M. de Brissac at the time of my third visit to London to pay the reward promised for the recovery of my diamonds. I do not know where they are placed, but Morin, now detained at La Force, would know. I have, besides, forty double louis and some half guineas, packed with many other articles of value which belong to me, but I do not know where they are, having relied upon my servants to put them in a place of safety, but I believe they are in a hiding-place near the ice-house.

Q. Do you know an Abbé named La Roche?

A. I know an Abbé Fontenille, who came many times to my house and frequently stayed there. I had given him a room there as a return for the kindness his aunt showed me when I was in exile at Pont-aux-Dames, but I have not seen him since September last year, and do not know what has become of him.¹

The commissioners then retired, after having themselves signed, and made Du Barry sign, a separate declaration concerning each letter that had been shown her, besides the copy of her depositions. It will be seen that Du Barry did not, as has often been asserted, endeavour to save her own head by betraying her friends. She says no more than she is obliged, and professes not to know the whereabouts of any of her correspondents. Had she been either absolutely reticent, or extra-communicative, it would have made no difference as to the fate of any of the persons she mentioned who might be unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the Republican Tribunal. When "aristocrats" were sentenced to death on the most trivial and absurd evidence, and even if acquitted were struck down at the very doors of the court-room, it seems idle to talk of injurious revelations.

The Vandenyvers, father and son, had also been arrested, and the elder one was also interrogated by Voulland and Jagot, but little was obtained from him, though it is not unlikely that the caution he displayed did Du Barry some

¹ The Abbé La Roche-Fontenille, nephew of the Abbess of Pont-aux-Dames, was guillotined the 6th Brumaire, year II (October 27, 1792), only three days before Du Barry made the above declaration.

harm, or would have done if her fate had not been a foregone conclusion. On the 2nd, 4th, and 7th of Frimaire (23rd, 25th, and 28th of November) all the prisoners were examined by Dumas, one of the judges of the Tribunal. He behaved very much as a *juge d'instruction* would at the present day, and tried to coax, bully, or entrap Du Barry into making a confession. Amongst other things, he declared that the pretended lawsuit was only a pretext to conceal a secret mission, and that the true object of Du Barry's journeys to England was to help the enemies of the Republic. This was proved, he said, by a letter from De Brissac, dated *April 3, 1791*, or, in other words, Madame du Barry was guilty of having conspired against the Republic eighteen months before the Republic existed.

Du Barry contented herself with a simple denial of the charge. She learned from Dumas who was her accuser, and, erroneously believing that Fouquier-Tinville was a man, instead of a mere murderous animal, she addressed to him the following letter:

"CITIZEN PUBLIC ACCUSER,

"I hope that you will, in the impartial examination of this unfortunate affair, and the charges that Greive and his fellows have brought against me, see that I am the victim of a plot to ruin me. I have never emigrated, and have never intended to. The use that I made of the twenty thousand livres that Escourre placed for me with Citizen Rohan should prove this to the most prejudiced eyes. I have never furnished money to the *émigrés*, and I have never carried on any criminal correspondence with them, and if circumstances compelled me to see either at London, or in France, courtiers, or

persons who were not in sympathy with the Revolution, I hope that you will, Citizen Public Accuser, in the justice and equity of your heart, appreciate my conduct under all circumstances, and my known and forced *liaison* with Citizen Brissac, whose correspondence is before your eyes. I rely on your justice, you can rely upon the eternal gratitude of your "*consitoyenne*," (*sic*)

"VAUBERNIER DU BARRY."

An appeal to the heart of Fouquier-Tinville was not likely to be of much use. He threw the letter unread into a portfolio in which he placed the papers he did not wish to attend to. It is not evident what Du Barry intends by the phrase the *forced liaison* with De Brissac, nor how that could favourably impress Fouquier-Tinville. Probably in her excitement and perturbation she omitted several words, or even a sentence.

The only effect the letter had on Fouquier-Tinville was to make him hurry on the case. On November 23 Du Barry was brought to the Palais de Justice, and underwent a preliminary examination by Dumas, the vice-president of the Tribunal, in the presence of Fouquier-Tinville. She answered the questions in a straightforward manner, and denied all intention of emigrating. The Public Accuser took ten days to prepare the accusation. On the 14th Frimaire (December 4) Du Barry was transferred to that prison which has been called the threshold of the scaffold—the Conciergerie.

Comte Beugnot in his *Memoirs* asserts that he saw Du Barry in the Conciergerie, and speaks with scorn and contempt of her conduct whilst there, which he contrasts with that of Madame Roland, who was also in the prison

at that time. Madame du Barry has had so many traducers that one more or less does not very much matter, but really the poor woman might have been permitted to go out of the world without having any fresh lies told about her. The Comte's lies are, however, palpable, and easily detected. Madame Roland was guillotined November 8: Du Barry was brought to the prison December 4. Beugnot could not, therefore, have seen both women at the Conciergerie, if indeed he ever saw either. But Du Barry is not the only sufferer: the book is full of interviews with people he never saw, and conversations between men who could never have met.

At any rate Madame du Barry was only an inmate of the Conciergerie for a day and a half. It is said that she occupied the cell in which Marie Antoinette had been placed when first brought to the Conciergerie—if so there was a strange irony in events. No credence is to be given to the story that an Irish priest managed to get admission to Du Barry's cell, and offered to procure her release if she would give him money to bribe the gaolers. Du Barry asked if it were not possible to save two persons, but the priest did not think he could save more than one, whereupon Du Barry gave him a cheque on her bankers—not a valuable consideration, one would think, considering her bankers were in the same prison—and asked him to save Madame de Mortemart. Dutens says that the priest went to Calais where the Duchesse de Mortemart was, escaped with her into Belgium, and thence into England. One would like to believe this story of Madame du Barry, but the order on the bankers, quipped with the fact that the Madame de Mortemart in hiding at Calais was not *the* Madame de Mortemart in whom Du

Barry took an interest, but her sister-in-law, stamp the story as an invention.

The trial of Madame du Barry, the elder Vandenyver, and his two sons, began at nine o'clock in the morning of December 6. No official account of it exists, nor did any journalist take a verbatim note of the depositions. Fouquier-Tinville, however, wrote with extraordinary rapidity, and he jotted down every answer given, though he did not trouble to transcribe the questions. The most detailed account of the trial, that given by Madame Guémard in the supposed *Memoirs of Du Barry*, is apparently founded on Fouquier-Tinville's notes, the questions being supplied to fit the answers given.

The first witness called was Greive, who declared that he had found in a dung-heap near the road, a quantity of precious stones, gold and silver, portraits of Louis XV as a Carmelite friar (!), Anne of Austria, the Regent, and a medal bearing the likeness of Pitt. He knew that an English spy, named Forth, made frequent journeys between Louveciennes and London. The general opinion of the villagers was that the robbery was nothing but a pretence.

Blache, co-partner with Greive in villainy, testified that he was in London in 1790 as a teacher of the French language, and that in 1793 when Louis Capet was executed Du Barry wore mourning for him. The Chevalier d'Escourre, who was brought from the prison of La Force, gave evidence concerning the loan of two hundred thousand francs to Rohan-Chabot. Salanave, who had been servant to Du Barry, declared that the reason he was not liked by the household was because he was a patriot, and all the other servants were aristocrats!

Zamor, the black-man, who acknowledged that he had

been brought up by Madame du Barry, said that the greater number of persons who came to the house were not patriots. He had heard them rejoice over the defeats of the armies of the Republic. He had always regarded the robbery of the diamonds as "an idea" (*sic*). He did not believe it was a real robbery. Witness finally declared that he had many times reproached Du Barry with associating with aristocrats, but she did not deign to reply.

The remaining witnesses did not give any evidence that would be considered valuable in a police court. It was an abuse of the names of Law and Justice to listen to men like "Augustin Devrey, surgeon," declare that he had once heard the widow Collet say that, some time after the arrest of De Brissac, Du Barry spent the night in destroying papers; or Claude Reda, the fencing master, testify that he had *heard it said* that when Du Barry was in London she saw the Calottes.

Against the Vandenyvers there was not one tittle of evidence. Du Barry was a woman of depraved morals, who had squandered millions of francs of the public money—these were reasons, more or less sufficient, why the vengeance of the people should fall upon her, but for the murder of the Vandenyvers there was not the shadow of an excuse.

No witnesses were called for the defence: to speak for an aristocrat or a "conspirator" was to label oneself as belonging to the same category, and the witness would soon have followed the prisoner to the scaffold. Chaveau-Lagurde—who, to his honour be it said, had boldly defended many of the victims of the Revolution, including the Queen and Charlotte Corday—made the strongest defence he was able, and was seconded by Lafleuterie, but they

might as well have attempted to persuade a wolf into letting go a lamb.

From Fouquier-Tinville's speech for the prosecution a few lines may be given, not as examples of fine oratory, or convincing logic, but to give an idea of the mental capacity of the jury who listened to such stuff.

"CITIZEN JURYMEN,

"You have judged the conspiracy of the wife of the last tyrant of the French, you have at this moment to judge the plots of the courtesan of his infamous predecessor. You have to decide if this Messalina—born amongst the people, enriched by the spoils of the people, and who by the death of the tyrant fell from the rank in which crime alone had placed her—has conspired against the liberty and sovereignty of the people; if after being the accomplice and the instrument of the libertinage of kings, she has become the agent of the conspiracies of tyrants, nobles, and priests against the French Republic. You know what light the evidence of the witnesses and the documents have thrown upon this plot.... It is for you in your wisdom to weigh the evidence. You see that royalists, federalists, all these factions, though divided amongst themselves in appearance, have all the same centre, the same object and aim. The war, abroad, or in La Vendée, the troubles in the South, the insurrection in Calvados.... all march under the orders of Pitt, but now the veil which covered so much wickedness has been rent in twain, and nothing remains to the conspirators but shame and the punishment of their infamous plots. Yes, Frenchmen, we swear that the traitors shall perish and liberty alone shall endure.... In striking with the

sword of the law a *conspiratrice*, a Messalina guilty of plotting against the country, you not only avenge the Republic, but you uproot a public scandal, and you strengthen the rule of that morality which is the chief base of the liberty of the people."

The charges against Du Barry, as they were stated in the summing-up, were that she was:

Accused of conspiring against the French Republic, and having favoured the success of the arms of the enemies on its territory, by procuring for them exorbitant sums in her journeys to England, where she herself emigrated;

Wearing, at London, mourning for the late King;

Living habitually with Pitt, whose effigy she wore on a silver medal;

Having caused to be buried at Louveciennes the letters of nobility of an *émigré*, and also the busts of the former Court;

And having wasted the treasures of the State by her extravagance when she lived with Louis XV.

The jury returned an "affirmative answer" on every count in the indictment; Fouquier-Tinville demanded the "application of the law"; and all four prisoners were sentenced to suffer capital punishment within twenty-four hours, and all their goods to be confiscated to the Republic. The verdict was given at half-past eleven at night, and the execution was fixed for eleven o'clock the following morning. In those times there was never more than an interval of a few hours between the sentence and the guillotine—in the present day French legists have run into the other extreme.

In this case the execution did not take place at the hour appointed. To gain time, or in the vain hope of saving her head, Madame du Barry sent for Denuzot, one of her judges, Claude Roger, the deputy Public Accuser, and Tavernier, a *greffier*, and made a confession or declaration. Some have asserted that in these, her last moments, she basely and treacherously betrayed her friends and acquaintances, and M. Louis Blanc has given the exact number of the persons she denounced which, we are told, was neither more nor less than *two hundred and forty*. With sorrow we confess that Du Barry really did hand over to the tender mercies of the Revolutionary Tribunal upwards of two hundred and forty innocent and defenceless—articles of value. For upwards of three hours was the *greffier* busy in writing down the description of the gold and silver plate, jewellery, etc., which Du Barry had “planted” in various parts of her garden. Only two persons are mentioned, Morin and the wife of the *frotteur*, who concealed various articles by command of their mistress. All the other articles Du Barry declared that she buried without assistance. That the unfortunate woman still retained some hope that if she gave up all her treasures her life would be spared, is proved by the last lines of the declaration, “That if the Tribunal desires, she will write to London, and she can without difficulty recover the property of which she was robbed, on paying the costs of the action.”

The confession did not terminate till late in the afternoon. Any hopes that the wretched Du Barry had of prolonging her life by offering to give up her property were at once dissipated, for as soon as she had arrived at the end of her declaration, orders were given for the

execution the following day. Many stories have been told of how wildly she clung to life; of her shrieks which were so heart-rending that murmurs began to arise amongst the crowd, and if the driver of the tumbril had not made his horses gallop a rescue would have been attempted. Some of the anecdotes of her death are untrustworthy, for they contradict each other, and of others it can only be said that they may be true but there is no evidence to support them. A story one would like to believe is that she promised "the good people of Paris all her property if they would but save her life." "Bah, you have no property," cried a well-dressed man in the crowd; "it has all been confiscated to the Republic." A *charbonnier*, who was standing in front of him, turned round and struck him on the mouth with his fist.

According to the generally received version of the story of the death of Du Barry, she struggled frantically when she was led on the scaffold, implored the executioner to grant her "Just one second more," and even when placed on the plank cried, "You won't hurt me, will you?" The account as given in "The Gentleman's Magazine" says: "Her behaviour was by no means firm. The executioner was under the necessity of supporting her in his arms during the whole way. When she arrived at the foot of the scaffold, the two assistants of the executioner were obliged to lift her upon it. When they were on the point of fastening her to the plank, she exerted her strength and ran to the other side of the scaffold: she was soon brought back and tied; her head was immediately struck off."

The journals of the day, though ready enough to gloat over the sufferings of the victims of the guillotine, do not

mention her wild and hopeless appeals to the executioner, though *Le Glaive vengeur* says that when the plank was tipped up to bring her head under the knife she uttered a terrible shriek. It seems certain, however, that she did not display the calm courage with which the victims of the Terror usually met their fate, and modern historians have not failed to deduce a moral from her cowardice and contrast her behaviour with that of Marie Antoinette, Charlotte Corday and Madame Roland. Amongst the women "who died like men, and men who died like heroes," she alone was wanting in bravery;—her conscience could give her no comfort, and she ended a life of vice, it is said, in abject fear of a well-deserved doom.

The difficulty of pleasing everybody was recognized thousands of years before the fable of the Old Man and his Ass was ever penned. If Du Barry had died with a scornful smile upon her lips, we should just as certainly have heard that a long career of vice had blunted, if not destroyed, her conscience, and that she showed as cynical an indifference to death as she always had done to virtue or religion.

After all, the behaviour of a man or a woman condemned to be guillotined is a purely personal matter, and one probably affected more by physiology than pure principles. Amongst the liberties gained by the Revolution might surely be included the very modest one of the right to die exactly as one pleased. Some of the writers who animadvert on the "unmanly" behaviour of Du Barry, also regard the stoicism of Madame Roland as a proof that she was unwomanly.¹ Midway between these two

¹ KAVANAGH, *Woman in France in the 18th Century*, Vol ii, p. 232.

extremes we should find, presumably, the exact etiquette to be observed at one's own execution. Really it is a pity that some Turveydrop of the Terror did not bring out a little handbook, entitled, let us say, "Behaviour on the Bascule, or how to get Guillotined Gracefully."

If Du Barry showed cowardice in her last moments there were physical reasons for it, and there were no moral motives to make her brave. She had not, as Marie Antoinette had, the pride of race, the scorn of outraged dignity, or the poignancy of sorrow; or like Charlotte Corday, or Madame Roland, the sense of being a martyr for a cause she deemed holy. On the other hand, she was a woman in magnificent health, strong and active of body, and of no great mental power—in short, a healthy animal. Under ordinary circumstances she would no doubt have lived for another twenty-five or thirty years. Nothing but the guillotine knife, or some such violent end, could

"say 'No!'"

To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go."

It was as natural for her to struggle for life as it is for the bird to peck at the hand that comes to take it out of the trap.

With the great majority of the hundreds of unhappy women who "died like men," the case was different. Hurried from the prison to the tribunal, from the tribunal to the tumbril, and from the tumbril to the scaffold, they were dazed and overpowered by the suddenness of their doom. Weakened in body by a prolonged stay in the noisome cells of the Conciergerie, crushed in spirit by the foul taunts and insults of Fouquier-Tinville, unable to catch amidst the sea of cruel faces which surrounded them one trace of pity or sympathy, the journey to the

scaffold must have seemed to most of the delicately-nurtured women and young girls who perished, like a hideous and horrible dream. The mute heroism with which they met their fate was often but a semi-comatose condition induced by hopeless despair—a moral syncope which beneficently paralyzed all mental and bodily efforts.

This is no mere fanciful theory, invented to explain or excuse the conduct of Madame du Barry, but a fact noticed by several observers—amongst others that rough, shrewd, sometimes powerful, writer who has not unfittingly been called the “Rousseau of the gutter.”¹ Nor was this physical and mental prostration confined only to the women. The men did not invariably perish like heroes or martyrs. L’Ecuyer, a cavalry major, “was already more than half dead when he underwent his sentence”; the firm bearing of Philippe Egalité contrasted strongly with the conduct of those who were executed with him; and even Camille Desmoulins could not imitate on the scaffold the fearless disdain of death of his companion, Danton.

Very few of the men and women who suffered during the Revolution were put to death for any valid reason, but in the case of Du Barry not even the usual shallow pretexts could be invoked. Many of the men, and some few of the women, had taken active part in the great political struggles of the period; when they were in power they beheaded their enemies; when the whirligig of time brought in its revenges their enemies beheaded them.

¹ “J’ai toujours vu que, Marianne-Charlotte exceptée, tous les êtres pensants qui allaient à la mort étaient *moitié morts déjà*. J’avais fait la même observation sur les douze de Bretagne, *auxquels le public a donné de la fermeté*.” RESTIF DE LA BRETONNE, *Vingt nuits de Paris*, p. 546.

Most of the women and some of the men were simply "aristocrats" who had fallen into the hands of a democracy "drunken with the blood of a king." But Du Barry knew nothing of the politics of the day, and if she ever had taken a side (which we have ventured to doubt) it was years before the Republic had been dreamed of. Nor was she an aristocrat. She was a peasant by birth, a prostitute by proclivity, and a democrat—so far as she was anything at all—in character. The heaviest charges against her were that she led an immoral life, and had wasted the public money, but that all immoral and extravagant women should be put to death has never been suggested by the most fanatical of Exeter Hall orators. Such frivolous and absurd prettexts as having worn mourning for the late King, and having possessed a portrait of Pitt, sufficed to bring under the knife the neck that Louis XV loved to encircle with diamonds—to shear off what had once been the fairest head in France—to close for ever those limpid blue eyes that often beamed with love, or sparkled with merriment, but never flashed with hatred, scorn, or revenge—to lay still and cold that white hand which courtiers had kissed, and which was ever ready to bestow upon the poor and the unfortunate her ill-gotten, but not ill-spent wealth.

Thus perished the last of the great "Queens of the Left Hand"—the last that France has seen, and probably the last Europe will ever see. The abuse that had been lavished upon her during her life was continued after her death—continues even down to the present day, or at least, did continue till within the last few years. That the facts concerning her private life were long unknown, was mainly her own fault, for she took great pains to

conceal them, but the events of her public life were patent to all, and they have invariably been construed to her disadvantage. Her vices have been scourged with a severity which would be highly commendable if the historians wrote only for Clapham Common Academies, and not for men and women, and not one trace of any good quality has been accorded her. It is better to remember that it is to her credit that, though she had vast opportunities for doing mischief, she never did one cruel or unjust action. Not one man in France ever suffered by so much as an hour's imprisonment at her hands, but she saved at least four lives from the gallows.

No attempt has been made in these pages to describe her as a virtuous and noble woman, but an effort, however weak and unavailing, has been made to show that she was not as bad as she is usually made out to be.

The writer of this book, penning these words at the very hour and day of her death, one hundred and two years after the event, ventures to hope that some slight and tardy measure of justice may be done to the memory of the beautiful, kind-hearted, unfortunate, and much traduced Jeanne du Barry.

CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE

A FEW words must be said of some of the other actors who were on the scene with Du Barry, and whose fate was more or less connected with hers.

First in importance of these stands Jean du Barry, the *Roué*, who if he did not initiate Jeanne Becu in vice, was the means of her promotion to the place of Mistress to the King.

For the first few years after the death of Louis XV, he was in exile, and wandered about Europe from one Casino to another. His sister-in-law had kept him well supplied with money, as long as Louis XV was alive, and he boasted that he had spent eighteen millions of francs—which was certainly a lie, as the total amount lavished on Madame du Barry was six millions, and he had but little money of his own. When he lost large sums at the gaming table he was wont to reply to the friends who congratulated him on the philosophic manner in which he bore his ill-luck: "It is you, my friends, who pay for it all."

After a year or two of exile he was permitted to return to Paris, but seems to have retired to Toulouse, where he

built himself a house which was quite a show place, and was described by Arthur Young in his *Voyage in France*. His first wife died in 1775, and he married the widow of another Du Barry.

When the Revolution broke out he espoused the popular side, equipped at his own cost the National Guard of the quarter of Toulouse in which he resided, and was appointed second colonel of the regiment. He was heavily in debt, and was obliged to hide from his creditors. A charge of being an *émigré* and of having conspired against the Republic was brought, and though he proved easily that he had never left France, he attempted no further defence, replying to the Public Accuser that "the short time he had to live was not worth the trouble of arguing about." He was then about seventy. He was condemned to death, and executed in February 1794. On the road to the scaffold he appeared troubled, but quickly recovering himself, he saluted the crowd, and said, "Adieu, my friends! Adieu, my dear fellow-citizens!" He met his death with resignation and firmness, thus repairing the errors of his life, which he had long deplored.

His brother Guillaume, the husband of Madame du Barry, was also arrested as a "suspect," but he managed to save his neck, and died a few years later.

Several of Madame du Barry's servants suffered death, simply because they were faithful to their duty, and had obeyed the orders of that "*conspiratrice*." Her confidential servant, Morin, who was arrested with her, was lodged in La Force. A few days after the execution of his mistress he was taken to Louveciennes to help to find the buried jewels and gold, but he could not, or would not,

reveal the hiding-places, and was taken back to prison. On December 23, Morin and Labondie (a relative of the Chevalier d'Escourre) were brought before the Tribunal. One witness declared that Morin had been seen reading a Revolutionary newspaper and actually laughing at it; and another said that the accused had discharged a gardener who was a good patriot and the father of four children. On evidence of this kind both were condemned to death and executed the same day.

Prétry, valet-de-chambre to Madame du Barry, was also denounced by that estimable Englishman, Greive, as the "most cruel anti-revolutionist there is in France." He was imprisoned, but in spite of all the efforts of Greive, he escaped the guillotine. Deliant and his wife, who had concealed in their cottage some valuables belonging to Du Barry, were threatened with death if they did not divulge to Greive where the property was hidden. They finally produced the jewels, but Greive continued to threaten them, and did so to such effect that Deliant died of fear, and his wife cut her throat with a razor.

Zamor, the negro who had been brought up by Du Barry, is generally considered as the author of her death. As a matter of fact he only feebly seconded the accusations of Greive, and his evidence had little to do with her fate. Nevertheless he was guilty of the basest ingratitude towards his mistress and benefactress. It is pleasant to reflect that he met his deserts. Only three weeks after the death of Du Barry he was imprisoned as *très suspect*. Greive, who did not wish to be deprived of one of his best tools, wrote to Fouquier-Tinville demanding not only in his own name, but in the name of the "brave patriots of the Café Procope where he is esteemed

by all who are estimable," that "the virtuous Zamor, that child of nature, that apostle of liberty, that worthy pupil of the immortal Jean Jacques," should be set at liberty. The petition succeeded and Zamor was set free. He was reserved for what Kingsley has called "the worst of all punishments, immunity." For many years he dragged on a miserable career, supporting himself by giving lessons, but his pupils were generally removed as soon as their parents found out who he was, and he died of starvation in 1820.

The only two persons who might be said to more or less remotely owe their deaths to Madame du Barry, were the Chevalier d'Escourre and Princesse Lubomirska. Greive received instructions to arrest every person found at the Château de Louveciennes, and executed his orders faithfully. While conducting his prisoners to Paris he met a cabriolet containing the Chevalier d'Escourre, who was on his way to pay a visit to Du Barry. He was arrested, and added to the other victims. Some of the letters which had been seized showed that he had acted as the agent in a loan of two hundred thousand francs which Madame du Barry had made to Rohan-Chabot. He was charged with having "practised machinations against the Republic," and tried, condemned, and executed December 11—three days after Du Barry.

Amongst the letters found at Louveciennes were one or two from a young and beautiful Polish lady, the Princesse Lubomirska. One of these letters, written before the execution of Marie Antoinette, contained an innocent remark about the Queen; and another expressed sympathy with Madame du Barry in her "unjust persecutions." This was quite sufficient for Greive to work on. A state-

ment in the letter to the effect that the Queen was still at the Conciergerie was construed into a charge of having aided in an attempt to effect the escape of Marie Antoinette, and the Princesse was arrested, and condemned, April 22, 1794. She declared that she was pregnant, her execution was deferred till June 30, when—two doctors and a midwife having declared that they could find no sign of pregnancy—she was guillotined.

Of Greive himself a few words ought to be said. He continued to live at Louveciennes during the Reign of Terror, and boasted that he had brought to the scaffold seventeen heads, including that of Citoyenne du Barry. He probably did not include in the list the Deliants, and perhaps others, whose death he had caused in an unofficial and unworkmanlike manner. When the tables were turned he was kicked out by the villagers, who suddenly remembered (when the winter came again) what a benefactress Madame du Barry had been to them. He was arrested at Amiens, December 23, 1794, brought back to Versailles, tried, and acquitted, though no fewer than twenty-two witnesses appeared against him. He shortly afterwards left France or was expelled, and probably returned to America, for no trace can be found of his having revisited England. Of his future career and death nothing is known, which is a pity, for one would like to be able to record that this murderous scoundrel met with a fitting reward.

THE END.

N O T E S.

Note A. Page 85.

The authenticity of this story is not well established. In one book an obvious confusion has been made between the victim and the oppressor, and the name of the merchant is given as Berryer, which was the name of the Lieutenant of Police. A person named Tapin, who was supposed to be implicated in the Damiens affair, was confined in the Bastille for many years, and as Damiens had no accomplices—though many of the Jesuits were aware of his intention—perhaps he was the Lyons merchant. In spite of his precautions, Berryer was cashiered, which possibly accounts for the fact that his victim was not released, the only person who was acquainted with his supposed offence having no longer the power to set him free.

Note B. Page 311.

M. Vatel is responsible for the statement that the sword hilt of Vicomte du Barry forms, or did form a few years ago, the handle of the Corporation Seal of the City of Bath. No mention of it is made in Messrs. Jewett and Hope's very complete work on "Corporation Plate." Mr. St. John Hope, who finished the book after the death of Mr. Llewellynn Jewitt, writes to me that he has no information on the subject.

Note C. Page 315.

Mr. Henry Seymour, the son of Francis Seymour, was born in 1729, and died in 1805. He sat as M.P. for various places between 1763, and 1778, in which latter year he settled in France. He was also at one time Groom of the Bed-chamber to George III.

His son, who was also named Henry Seymour, had a natural daughter, who was, however, treated as one of the family. She married Sir Alfred Tichborne, Bart, and was the mother of the "missing baronet" who was personated by the claimant, Arthur Orton.

Note D. Page 340.

Although Madame Du Barry never obtained possession of her jewels again, it would appear that someone removed them from the custody of the Bankers. Mr. C. A. Law, the head of the Deposit Department at Messrs. Ransom and Bouverie's Bank, has kindly taken considerable trouble to trace out the history of the jewel box, but unfortunately without success. He writes to me that "The Deposit Books are continuous back to within about one year of the period when the jewels were deposited,—but they go no further back—however, the unclaimed Deposits were brought forward into a new Deposit Book, and amongst these I had hoped to find the entry you seek for, but as you are probably aware, a Banker does not receive Deposits for other than his customers, nor does he note contents of packages—in fact, he purposely avoids doing so—so that it is most probable the deposit would have been made in a name it is now difficult to identify. I think it extremely likely, in fact certain, that the public notoriety given to the case would have precluded any possibility of their remaining in our strong room longer than legal delays would have necessitated."

